

12. D. a

# S E R M O N S;

ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS;

BY

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THE LATEST NEWS OF THE DAY

AND THE MOST INTERESTING

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## P R E F A C E.

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**W**HEN an Author produces a work to the Public, it has been usual for him to offer some reasons for his undertaking, or some apology for his presumption. But where motives may be generally understood, it is unnecessary to explain. The feelings of a writer are easily imagined; and every attempt to conceal his views, or to divert attention from them, must end either in awkward affectation, in mean prevarication, or in direct falsehood.

In fact, publication requires no apology. It is a lottery, in which all but the immodest and the profane have an equal right to adventure. The world is at liberty to receive or to reject every book. Some may be raised into temporary fame, on the momentary whirlwind of popular rage. Some may get into notice by venal praise ; but where there is no intrinsic merit, the glittering meteor will vanish into mortifying neglect, and irretrievable oblivion.

The third, sixth, and ninth of these Discourses were preached on particular occasions, and published by request ; and are now re-printed.

Since every writer must be considered a very partial judge of his own works, he cannot reasonably expect to be heard in his own favour ; and the Author of these Sermons, even if he  
thought



thought he had ground for recommendation, would not be willing to speak for himself. He has rather a desire of intimating what there is not, than what he thinks may be found in his performance. He flatters himself, then, that his sentiments are not illiberal, and his doctrines not arrogant. He has not dwelt on speculative subjects. He sincerely venerates the Gospel, admires the purity, the sublimity of its principles, and its universal charity. Satisfied with his own faith, he disclaims bigotry, and respects the sentiments of every honest mind, of whatever denomination. If, therefore, from these Sermons none should receive pleasure, it is to be presumed none can take offence; and if they obtain no notice, they can only return to the obscurity from which they emerge. But should one humble disposition gain instruction, one wavering temper be confirmed, one devout character

character be lighted into fervour, or one unpious youth, in this too careless and fluctuating age, be preserved from a course of impiety by the perusal of this Volume, the author will receive the highest satisfaction; and it is to be hoped, without transgressing a becoming modesty, may congratulate himself, that his labour has not been in vain.

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ERRATA.

- Page 60, line 8, *for falls, read, fall.*  
92, — 13, *for unefficacious, read, inefficacious.*  
120, — 9, *for has, read, have.*  
216, — last, *for like the horse in a race, read, as in a race.*  
227, — 10, *for free conviction, read, force of conviction.*



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paintful nature, and supply the good, which they are not willing to produce at their own cost.

Others will praise it, because they hope

to recommend themselves by doing so. What

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tion to these motives, there is something inhu-

manely engaging in benevolence. The good feel

ing, do good to others, and are encouraged by kindness; and

the afflicted comforted by sympathy. This vir-

MATTHEW, v. 44.

But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

**T**HERE is no character which will more effectually recommend a person to the good opinion of the world than that of benevolence. It gives a lustre to virtues, which might appear unengaging without it. The reason is obvious. Many are interested in the benefits which this principle of charity confers. Some expect to derive advantage from it immediately; others remotely. Some extol it because they are conscious of the self-denial necessary for conforming to its precepts; they therefore are willing that others should exempt them from duties of a painful



painful nature, and supply the good, which they are not willing to produce at their own expense. Others will praise it, because they hope to recommend themselves by doing so. What they appear to admire, they flatter themselves they shall be thought to practise. But in addition to these motives, there is something inherently engaging in benevolence. The good feels its delights; the poor experience its benefits. The modest are encouraged by kindness; and the afflicted consoled by sympathy. This virtue is not only amiable, but also confidential. Those whom we know to be capable of feeling, we are willing to trust. Men, who have no compassion for others, may be unjust, oppressive, revengeful; but they, who can bleed for the present calamities, or who are anxious to prevent the future distresses, of their fellow-creatures, we may presume, will not voluntarily produce that misery which they have the tenderness to pity, nor create that wretchedness which they can so sensibly anticipate. Benevolence is a great attribute of the Deity; it must therefore exalt the nature of man. It formed the most engaging feature in the character of our great Redeemer; and in the imitation of him consists the perfection of the Christian.



Benevolence will again be interesting from the ill consequences which are known to attend the opposite temper. An implacable disposition is not only a scourge to itself, but a torment to others. All therefore who dread the one will extol the other; and the lights in the portrait of the good man, will be more brilliant from the contrast of shadow.

This virtue has received the highest perfection in the precepts of the Gospel. The benevolence of nature is heightened by Christian charity. Those instinctive feelings, which the great Creator has implanted in the human heart by that law of conscience, which is universal and irresistible, have been taught by the Son of God to expand and to operate.

On benevolence is founded a readiness to forgive injuries. This disposition of mind is, however, difficult to be attained. The prejudices of education, the violence of unrestrained passions, the selfishness of individuals, and ill habits long indulged, war against it. The gratification of some passions depends on the transgression of the duty. For unhappily, through ignorance and indiscretion, the principles of revenge are commonly sown in the minds of children; their early resentments are

encouraged, and their tempers inflamed. Thus our vanity, our self-love, our pride, must be pruned of their luxuriance before we can practise it. Where these can be indulged at the expense of another man, who will be restrained from an excess which at once pleases so many advocates, which satisfies so many interests? We must first be convinced that it is advantageous to restrain the licentiousness of passion, before we shall be induced to do so. But this must be ascertained by experience. We must divest ourselves of all present interests; and therefore few are found, who are ready to relinquish an immediate indulgence for a remote advantage.

In the Jewish system of morality it was not deemed improper to retaliate. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy*, said that law, as quoted by our blessed Saviour in the verse preceding the text. But in his more pure and perfect doctrines we are raised above all little prejudices. We are inspired with views of an heavenly nature, and all the objects of temporal consideration vanish before them. I say unto you, says he, *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you.*

Some will object to this doctrine its meanness, and others its impracticability. Mean indeed it must



must appear to those, who cannot comprehend the sublimity of the Christian duties; who cannot perceive that they are approaching to the temper of divinity by *so learning Christ*. And difficult will they seem to those, who have never restrained the violence of their own passions. Let such then know, that to forgive is the proof of true dignity; but to indulge resentment, the mark of a low mind; of a mind enslaved to little interests, and the prey of despicable passions.

It may be inquired in what latitude we are to understand the injunction of the text. We can endeavour at forbearance with respect to our enemies, but must we also do good to them that hate us? Is it not sufficient to abstain from a retaliation; but must we also be active in returning good for evil?

Let us state the situation of our Saviour when he gave this precept, and of the persons to whom it was given.

The words of the text are a part of the sermon on the mount. Our Lord was addressing two descriptions of men; his immediate followers, and the mixed multitude. By the former these precepts were to be observed literally. They were to be sent into the world, and ex-

posed to a series of difficulties, in the service of their great Master. They were to suffer many things for his sake, and to count it gain that they were afflicted. The same precepts were applicable in a degree to all who heard them, and to all who shall learn them. And how they are to be understood, is evident from the nature of some other exhortations delivered at the same time. *Ye have heard, says our blessed Saviour, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. If any man will sue at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.* These expressions are hyperbolical; but they show us the true extent of Christian charity. To offer a cheek to the smiter is needless; to give a cloke to him who claims only a coat is an act of extravagant bounty; to go two miles to direct or aid him who wishes only to be assisted for one, is an useless kindness. What then are we to understand, but that we should be ready to perform more than the mere act of unavoidable obligation? that we should rather be patient to bear than to revenge an injury? To the immediate followers



followers of our blessed Saviour, the precept was more literal. They were really to offer the cheek to the smiter. They were to court danger. We are indeed to repulse the attacks of an enemy; but not otherwise than the right of self-preservation will warrant. We are so far commanded to suffer, as not to create additional resentment by unnecessary provocation.

Could men divest themselves of the prejudices which partiality, passion, and the errors in education occasion, they would see how reasonable this duty is; and that it would be useful to practise it, even on motives of present advantage. It is our interest, as well as our duty, to be at peace with all men. A short intercourse with the world will satisfy us of the truth of this observation. There are few, who have lived any time, who have not found themselves benefited, at an unexpected season, by persons from whom they never hoped to derive any advantage, with whom too they have perhaps had some cause of contention. Many again are in the number of our friends, whom prejudice may have painted in false colours, whom misconception may have rendered odious to us at the first impression, or misrepresentation injured in our esteem. Now suppose we had indulged these

early prejudices, or suffered an irritable or jealous propensity to break out into any extravagant acts of passion, might we not have mourned for the want of the enjoyments we now possess, or have pined in solitude, without the consolation of that friendship which experience has proved to be the most fortunate and grateful? Thus many, by ill-timed resentment, have created enemies where they might have found friends, who in a critical moment, by a return of malice, have totally destroyed their present happiness. This is the fate of thousands, who, from the natural uneasiness of an unaccommodating or resentful disposition, render themselves hateful to mankind, and then complain that the world is not their friend. *Blessed are the meek,* says our Lord, *for they shall inherit the earth\*.* Peace and tranquillity will always eventually attend those who seek for happiness in a pacific mind. The peaceable cannot willingly offend, and therefore must be loved. Rage is the prey and the destruction of the temper which indulges it; and malevolence will often recoil on him who discharges it. It is difficult to encounter the whole world; and he will waste his life in unavailing fretfulness who seeks retaliation for

\* Matt. v. 5.



all the offences he meets. We shall find many out of the reach of our resentment; many too powerful to feel it, and many who can retort it with double force. The revengeful man will thus become the victim of passion, and the scorn of his enemies.

But are we then to show no resentment? Are we to be altogether passive? In answer to such questions it is to be observed, that resentment founded on justice differs from the anger which arises from an imaginary injury. The one is guided by reason, the other is the unbounded freedom of an impetuous temper. There are many perverse dispositions in the world; many who are themselves incapable of peace, and therefore regardless of the quiet of others. A dignified and reasonable resistance of such is the only security of our happiness; since a tame submission to injuries would subject us to the attacks of insolence, the brutality of cowardice, and the encroachments of the overbearing. A man may have aspersed our character, or violated our property, in some essential point. In these, and similar instances, we are to express such resentment as the natural rights of self-preservation, the laws of our country, and the principles of Christianity permit. But here we must beware of conceiv-  
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ing resentment too lightly; for anger does not always arise in a ratio proportionate to the offence. We are often more jealous of inferior qualities than of real excellence; more proud of science than of virtue; more ostentatious of accidental advantages than of merit justly deserved; more attached to our follies than to objects of greater worth. Hence some can bear reflections on their virtue with greater patience than on their qualifications of mind or body. Many will flame into passion on an opposition in politics, or in defence of party, who can hear the cause of religion insulted, or the name of God blasphemed, with a perfect indifference. And yet if the one is at all estimable, it must be infinitely more so than the other. The Scriptures say, *Be ye angry and sin not, neither let the sun go down on your wrath* \*.—So transient should the emotions of passion be!—We may be offended at the fault of another, but should never entertain personal hatred; and should endeavour to correct every sudden gust of passion with all possible diligence and care.

Some men conceive resentment hastily. They are soon inflamed, and as soon forget their anger. These are less offensive, because the effect

\* Eph. iv. 26.

of



of their ungovernable fury generally recoils on themselves. When the temporary madness ends, they have to repair injuries by mortifying submissions, by painful acknowledgments of misconduct, and by expensive retributions. But there is a description of men who possess tempers so opposite to the sweetness of the Christian, and to every principle of reason and natural morality, that it can only be distinguished by the title of diabolical. Such are those gloomy and revengeful tempers, who slowly or never forget an injury, real or imagined. If any crime may deserve punishment from the beneficent Parent of mankind, if any crime may expect the condemnation of the merciful Judge of the world, it surely must be this. Nor are its effects less painful in this present life, than liable to punishment in future. Such a man will be feared by all, and loved by none. He will be the prey of gloomy discontent and of splenetic moroseness; discontented because not able always to reach the object of his malevolence, and soured because disappointed. The progress of hatred is most alarming and painful. It begins with a small disgust, and ends in a settled aversion. It pines at the success of its object; and whether it has power or not to injure others, has no peace itself.

self. If disappointed it must grieve; if triumphant it must be pained. The Almighty seems to have given this passion its punishment even in the present world. We are so united by the several connexions of social life, that one part must suffer by the injury of another. The revengeful man therefore, to triumph over his enemies, must pull down destruction on himself; and sink like Sampson, in the house of Gaza, under the ruins which his own force and violence have effected.

On the whole, then, we shall find the duty recommended in the text highly instrumental to happiness in our present state; for if we resolve to retaliate the daily offences we may chance to meet, we can never be at peace. So ready are the greater part of mankind to offend: Some designedly, and some without intention; some from ignorance; some from officious folly; and some from mistaken decorum; that we must be continually tormented by vexation and anger. It would therefore be a judicious determination, when such characters indulge themselves in expressions which are capable of a double construction, always to understand them in the most favourable. By such an interpretation, satire must lose its acrimony, and ill-nature  
be



be deprived of its success. By such a conduct we shall secure our own peace, and adorn the patient religion of the humble Jesus.

But after all, there is no argument so forcible in favour of the duty recommended in the text, as that which our blessed Saviour has himself advanced. *If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father, which is in heaven, forgive your trespasses.* Numerous are the offences of which we are daily guilty, and of the forgiveness of the Almighty we have constant need; and we can never expect God to show us mercy, unless we show it to men.

Let us then follow the steps of our meek Redeemer. Behold him reviled, but not reviling! insulted, but not offended! Behold him nailed on the painful cross, and expiring in the agonies of death! You hear no malicious or offensive word escape his lips: And when his persecutors mock him with their senseless pity, even fainting with pain, and dying under their barbarous insults, hear him exclaim, *Forgive them, Lord! they know not what they do!* He had enemies, but those he loved; he had persecutors, but for those he prayed. They sought to do him evil, but he forgave and blessed them. They embittered his days by affliction, and curtailed the  
number

number of them by a premature and shameful death; but he died to save, and to give life eternal.

Let us never lose sight of this bright and perfect example. The Scriptures represent us to be here as pilgrims and strangers, who seek a more durable rest. Let us then put away all malice, and travel on together in peace; and as we hope to meet hereafter, let us now unite in friendship, that we may be prepared for that happy place where all enmity must cease. Let us remember, that our present contentions are vain, and of small importance; that the objects are momentary, and will soon be useless; that our future emulation will alone be, who shall render the best service to the God of peace in his tranquil kingdom, where friends and foes, where righteousness and love, shall meet together.



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## S E R M O N I I .

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*ON THE INORDINATE LOVE OF PLEASURE.*

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SERMON II.

ON THE INORDINATE LOVE OF PLEASURE.



## S E R M O N II.

## ON THE INORDINATE LOVE OF PLEASURE.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

**B**Y the word pleasure, which is here opposed to the love of God, we may understand either such gratifications as are directly immoral in their nature, or such as are innocent in themselves, but vicious in excess. In both senses men may be culpable. They may incur the displeasure of the Almighty, either by an immediate transgression of his laws, or by an incautious conduct; by so near an approach to the boundaries of vice, as to have forsaken the paths of virtue before they are sensible of their danger. In the former instance the outlines of conduct are strong and well marked. We can easily discern that a flagrant vice has the features of turpitude, and the common exercise of reason will be sufficient to detect them. But in those errors, which become such only by excess, we

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have

have no standard by which we can readily measure our state. The degrees of virtue and vice are less defined ; we are therefore more easily and unwarily involved in the consequences of error. In the verses preceding the text, St. Paul describes to his beloved Timothy the characteristic vices of the age, and it seems to be probable, that, by the phrase Lovers of Pleasure, he intends to include not only those who were attached to pleasures positively vicious, but those careless and volatile offenders also, who, through an extravagant and incessant round of frivolous delights, were, if not wilfully immoral, scarcely to be called virtuous ; if not deliberately bad, yet negligent in their conduct. Taking it for granted then, that we allow all immoral pleasures to be sinful, I shall proceed to show the dangerous effects of an immoderate pursuit of those, which are considered as innocent in themselves, or indifferent in their nature.

Men are apt to question as follows : How can the pursuit of that which is innocent, be injurious to the soul ? Are we not sent here to partake of the bounties of God ? Is not the enjoyment of them a mean of expressing our gratitude to the giver ? The Almighty is not a churlish parent. He must delight in the happiness of his creatures ;



creatures; and shall we therefore voluntarily abridge ourselves of that portion which he bestows? This reasoning would be conclusive, if it could be proved that the full enjoyment of our wishes would conduce to the perfection of happiness. But if the relish of those bounties depends on the mode and degree of use; if satiety of itself creates insensibility to bliss; if every enjoyment of the senses is exquisite only at intervals, but painful by continuance, like light, which is pleasurable to the eye, but which grows intolerable by condensation; if we are not capable of discerning accurately between good and evil; if *his* law, who gave us the power of enjoyment, is necessary to teach us the use of it, it will then follow that we can only find happiness by that light, which shall lead us to all truth. And where but in the Gospel of Jesus Christ shall we find it? Now in this there are certain duties which are required of us as subjects to a superior, as creatures, who are under a natural obligation to a great and kind benefactor. Such duties are indispensable, not only because they are commanded by infinite wisdom, but because they are conducive to our own interest, promote our own happiness, and preserve us from certain and inevitable misery. The first

and great commandment is, that we should love God ; that we should love him as a suitable return for his manifold, his inexpressible bounty to us : Not because the retribution is at all adequate to the obligation, but because the same goodness which induces our Almighty Parent to confer the benefit, has been graciously pleased to accept the retribution, and because it is the only possible return we can make. The earnest language of Scripture exhorts us to love God with all our strength, with all the heart, and with the whole soul ; which command includes every power, every sentiment and affection of the mind. Again, a proof of this love is, that we keep his commandments ; that we obey those laws which are not dictated by capricious power, but which are indispensable in the nature of things, and which are the more indispensable to us, because they are the foundation of all our expectations of eternal happiness or misery.

Now, as we are circumstanced, the great danger is, lest the purity of our affections should be polluted by attachments of a subordinate nature, lest the gratification of necessary wants, and of temporal desires, should supplant that first and best object of our love, to which all other objects should be subservient, and who  
seems



seems to claim it with a parental anxiety. As the laws of God are the foundation of our future expectations, we should be solicitous to guard the avenues of the heart, lest, through the wantonness of folly, or the levities of indiscretion, we should admit the enemy of the soul, and exchange the glories of eternity for the miserable recompence of momentary pleasure.

From these positions one obvious conclusion will follow:—Pleasure can only be good to man, when it is agreeable to God. If it interferes with his commands, if it induces us to love him less, and to neglect his worship for pursuits of less importance, or a vicious nature, it must be morally evil; and can only be innocent when pursued within the bounds prescribed by revelation, by reason, and by conscience.

Let us now consider that species of pleasure, which is distinguished by the title of amusing, which has no acknowledged mark of evil, and which, within proper restrictions, cannot be injurious. From the infirmities of the human nature, relaxation from severer pursuits becomes necessary. In arduous undertakings our spirits fail. We can no more bear to look intensely on a fixed point with the eye of the mind, than we can to look on the face of the sun with the vi-

sual organs. As in the works of art a complicated machine may be deranged by a variety of movements, so may the understanding. The faculties of the mind, like those of the body, are designed for rest. It is rest which gives vigour to labour, and labour procures the pleasures of rest. Hence it has been found necessary to invent various modes of relaxation, to prevent the faculties from decay. But when amusement supplies the place of action, as it too often does, and instead of serving as a pause from labour, becomes the chasm which separates a chain of laudable pursuits, it deserves to be branded with the title of dissipation. It is no longer innocent or indifferent in its nature, and instead of restoring mental strength, incapacitates us for enjoyment. For what vigour can be expected from a mind enervated by sloth or trifling? Does the insect that sports in the sun, or plays on the surface of the water, produce the honey of the industrious bee? or do men usually attain knowledge without application, or gain riches without industry? In our moral state it is exactly the same. Labour is necessary for the acquirement of virtue, and vigilance to preserve it; but a mind which is in a constant state of relaxation must



must ever be unguarded, and must ever be incapable of action.

If we turn to the sacred writings, we shall find them full of exhortations to watchfulness and prayer. We are there frequently and affectionately warned of the enemy that goeth about to devour. We are taught that temptations hourly surround us; that hidden rocks and treacherous quicksands render every advance in the voyage of life dangerous. We are told of terrors, more than sufficient to shake our constancy; of delusive pleasures, which are ever shedding their poisons around us; and how shall we escape such secret dangers or such terrible conflicts, the arrows which fly by night, the pestilence which walketh in the noon-day, unless by preserving a strict and perpetual watch over the avenues which admit temptation?

Virtue, we may be assured, is only to be acquired by laborious trials, and by unwearied perseverance; and that is not virtue which is not habitual. It does not consist in a casual disposition of the mind; it is not a capricious choice of good, active to-day, and negligent to-morrow. It should be uniform, regular, and constant. Let us then recollect the past dangers we

have escaped, and how often we have chanced to err even with the best intentions, and we must be sensible of the necessity of that divine exhortation, Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

The effect of dissipation, and a too eager pursuit of pleasure, must ever be to destroy the harmony and tranquillity of the mind. It ruffles that settled calm, which is necessary for the contemplation of serious objects; and has therefore been properly called the perpetual intoxication of soul. For can that man be disposed for meditation, who is agitated by a tempest of unsettled passions? Can the pure duties of religion be pursued amidst the engagements of sense, the pollutions of licentiousness, the noise of riot, or the flutter of little pursuits? The mind occupied in the attainment of wisdom, is like the calm water, which reflects the surrounding objects with truth and perspicuity. Disturbed by dissipation, it is a broken surface, where a thousand objects are playing in rude and unmeaning lines, and nothing is clear or intelligible.

If it should be asked, whether amusement may not be of such a nature as at once to relax and improve the mind—certainly it may. But the public



public amusements which engage the general attention of the world, are rather the inventions of those who are averse to thinking; contrivances to fill up the tedium of idleness, and to gratify with some employment, however trifling, those who are not engaged in the pursuit of wisdom, and have a fatal tendency to destroy manliness of thought.

From hence we may perceive the ill effects which attend on the intemperate use of pleasure; of which none is more dangerous than that suggested in the text, lest we should become too fond of the world, and forget Him who has given us all good things to enjoy, but who expects that they should be used with moderation, and repaid with gratitude. In the natural world the bounties of Providence are not diffused for waste, nor designed for inactivity. The rains which descend to give fertility to the earth, to supply the sources of refreshing fountains, and to form the channels of commerce, return again in rarefied vapours to renew their salutary office. The vegetation which is then nourished, repays with pleasant fruit or with grateful fragrance. In the Scriptures we are exhorted to cherish the divine influence of the Spirit, and taught that  
every

every branch which beareth not good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire.

As the joys of a future state are the objects of speculation, as the things eternal are not seen, it is indispensable for us to abstract ourselves occasionally from the world of sense. He who never indulges himself in serious meditation, must have a poor conception of religion. It is by a serious and fixed conviction of the value of our future interests, that we gain a victory over the world. The love of pleasure is a passion which will soon claim the whole heart, and compel us to surrender every wish for freedom. The enemy of mankind proposes this temptation, not only because it is palatable, but because it is intoxicating; and so fatal is it to the interests of religion, that we may safely conclude that no immoderate lovers of pleasure are lovers of God.

Let the libertine then only fly to incessant amusements to shun reflection; let the sensualist only sink in the sleep of pleasure; but let not those who claim the inheritance of saints, who call on the name of Christ, lose the inestimable rewards of eternity in the pursuit of giddy dissipation, or the false enjoyment of a moment. Let not such exchange the blessedness of immortality for pleasures,



asures, which have no charms but from novelty, which raise appetite, but never satisfy it. If it is folly to forfeit the privileges of the Gospel for the pleasures of sin, it must be an inconceivably greater folly to lose them from inattention or indolence.

Observe then the admonitions of our blessed Lord. Does not he exhort you to frequent meditation and prayer? Do you, in conformance to his precepts and his example, often retire to your closets, and call your ways to remembrance? Do you, in obedience to his order, separate yourselves from the gay, the thoughtless, the dissipated multitude, to watch and pray, lest ye fall into temptation?

To conclude: The duties of meditation and prayer are no less profitable than indispensable. The wisdom of man, in obedience to the commands of God, has appointed seasons when we may have leisure from the cares and occupations of life to forget the world, and anticipate the future. Let us not spend that day particularly, which is designed for so important a purpose, in frivolous or guilty pursuits; and let us not think the periodical duties of seasons sufficient for the attainment of the invaluable pleasures of  
immor-

immortality, but, amidst all the cares and enjoyments of life, look stedfastly forward to the glorious hope of immortality : So shall all our ways be true and just, and all our lives one constant prayer.



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S E R M O N III.

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*SUNDAY SCHOOLS RECOMMENDED.*

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## S E R M O N III.

### SUNDAY SCHOOLS RECOMMENDED.

[Preached before the Subscribers to a Sunday School, Stonehouse, Devon.]

MATTHEW, xxy. Part of the 40th Verse.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these  
my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

THE chapter, from whence the text is selected, is no less remarkable for its sublimity, than for the importance of the information which it affords. It represents to us, in the most striking and pathetic manner, some of the events of that awful day, when the innumerable race of rational beings shall be called to a strict account for the application of the several talents committed to their management; for their moral improvement, and their social conduct.

There is, however, no minute or circumstantial description of the events which are to happen at that solemn period. We are only told, in general terms, that the righteous will be

separated

separated from the wicked ; that the good shall enter on the fruition of the most perfect and permanent happiness ; that the unrighteous shall be condemned to inconceivable and eternal misery ; shall for ever be secluded from the contemplation of infinite wisdom, and the enjoyment of infinite goodness ; that whilst the seat of the blessed shall resound with the joyful and triumphant acclamations of beatified and glorious spirits, the dismal regions of the wicked shall echo with the sighs of despair ; sighs which shall not pervade the ears, nor awaken the compassion, of unsatisfied justice.

In this awful period, however, virtue is to receive a certain reward. *For the King shall say to them on the right hand, Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : For I was an hungry, and ye gave me meat ; thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in ; naked, and ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me\*.*

But because true benevolence knows no consciousness of merit in acts of goodness ; since it operates from the instinctive feelings of an excellent nature ; because it is sensible of no offen-

\* Matth. xl. 34, 35, 36.



tatious motives ; and because true Christian charity, according to the Apostle's admirable definition, *vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up* \* ; therefore the good are here beautifully described as unconscious of the merit imputed to them. They exclaim, *Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw we thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* V. 37, 38, 39, 40. After such a declaration, pride, surely, has no reason to look down with contempt on the poor, dignified with the honourable title of the brethren of Christ. And shall not the selfish blush to turn aside from the needy, who are thus substituted as the representatives of our best and most bountiful Benefactor ?

It is observable that, in this description, all the merit of virtue is ascribed to acts of benevolence ; to clothing the naked, and feeding the hungry. Whoever seriously considers the innate

\* 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

beauty, and the extensive advantage of Christian charity, will not wonder, that this divine virtue should be selected as a brilliant example of universal perfection. Our blessed Saviour is not here immediately recommending any particular duties to our practice : He merely draws a prominent feature, to convey an idea of an universal character. Other acts of moral virtue may prove the highest source of intellectual satisfaction, of internal peace, or divine consolation, to each individual ; but they only negatively profit the world. The humility of the modest, or the meekness of the peaceable, ultimately tend to the quiet and happiness of society, in their effects. But if we do no good to others, our virtue resembles the solitary duties of the hermit ; it may be practised with equal success in the desert : It is even less than the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, who still did some good, though on a principle of ostentation. Whereas, philanthropy is an active virtue, and a positive good ; it runs on in an endless channel, always refreshing like the cooling streams ; or like the sun it invigorates, it cheers, and pervades all nature ; *and nothing is hid from the heat thereof*\*.

\* Psalm xv. 6.

Indeed,



Indeed, it may reasonably be doubted whether any virtues can exist, where good-will to mankind is wanting: Perfect they cannot be, and splendid they will never seem; for where benevolence is naturally deficient in the texture of the mind, or has not been duly cultivated, there must be an absence of every thing which is amiable. Other virtues will require a good principle to render them perfect, and lustre to make them pleasing. Many will lose their beauty; and some their dignity. Many will want force, begun with languor and degenerating into selfishness. All will operate in a narrow sphere, and exist on a little scale. Patriotism cannot dilate, nor friendship grow warm. The selfish man is the friend of none; but on the benevolent you may rely: Their own natural feelings will secure you from injury; and their own innate principles will animate them to promote your advantage.

There is another reason why benevolence, or charity, should be considered, by our blessed Master, as the great outline of general virtue. Look over the whole arrangement and combination of created matter. Observe how it is disposed to produce universal benefit. Examine too the moral government of Providence in the

disposal of events which concern mankind, and you will discover eminent traces of unexceptionable and unlimited tenderness. Is not the good of the whole admirably connected, and inseparable from the good of each? Does not the sun shine, and the rain fall alike on all? Does not the divine benevolence act on a grand and comprehensive scale? Is it not influenced by the most magnificent principles? And may not that perfection be considered as the first excellence of man, which seems to be, as it were, the soul of the divine operations? Consider too, what was the great object of a revelation of the divine will. Was it not to unite all mankind under one common interest, under one universal Parent, and by the reciprocal ties of mutual goodwill? To stretch philanthropy to the utmost possible extent; to include even enemies within its boundless sphere? Is it not calculated to remove all narrow prejudices, and to enlarge all social virtues? And is not every page of its sacred compositions full of exhortations to universal love, and to unlimited benevolence? Does it in any instance interfere with the happiness of society? Does it attempt to gain votaries by conquest, or compel men to embrace its doctrines by violence? Does it endeavour to win  
you



you to any interest of its own? Or does it draw you by any other influence than the impulse of that heavenly Spirit which will fill the mind with all peace and joy?

As benevolence, therefore, is so excellent in itself, and so evident in all the designs of the Almighty Providence, we need not wonder that the Son of God should express the whole of virtue in his character of the just, in the last day, by this amiable affection of the mind.

Philanthropy, however, owes much of its perfection to Revelation, which has enlarged its limits, extended its views, defined its degrees, and increased its objects. Human benevolence is heightened and finished to the last degree, and in the utmost extent, in the comprehensive scheme of Christian charity.

Having thus far enlarged, by way of comment, on the text, I shall employ the remaining part of our time in considering, in the most concise manner possible, first, the motives which should influence us to the practice of charity;

Secondly, The objects, and the manner of performing it;

And lastly, shall, by way of inference, recommend to you the institution, which is the occasion of the present meeting.

Mankind consist of two classes; such as are able to assist others, or such as are in want of assistance. It must be obvious to every one, who thinks for a moment, that the Almighty has so adjusted the nature of the world, that the abundance of one part may supply the deficiency of the other, and thus preserve the equilibrium of society. This idea is confirmed by the Christian religion, which represents the rich to be the stewards of the Almighty, the instruments, and second means of his Providence; and it is a very fatal mistake to conceive that the whole of our fortunes may lawfully be expended in supplies for luxury, for fancy, or amusement. Besides this, we cannot employ money to a better advantage. Here avarice may procure a future interest, and sensibility a present satisfaction. For after all that imagination may conceive, after all the studied gratifications which fancy may invent, no pleasures will be found so satisfactory or so exquisite as those which arise from acts of benevolence. The exercise of this virtue will fill the soul with the same delightful sensations, the same settled composure and softness, which we experience from the effect of plaintive sounds. Like music it will calm the perturbations, and restore the tranquillity, of the mind;



mind ; for as the one is the agreement of sound and sense, the other is the concord of souls.

If therefore to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked, to console affliction, and to alleviate pain, is a task pleasing in itself ; it must come recommended to us with all the additional persuasion which self-interest or self-love can give it : For the Saviour of mankind, who exhibited the most astonishing proofs of benevolence in his death and passion, for the salvation of the whole world, who has purchased for us all the hopes of eternal enjoyment, has recommended the poor to us in the most pathetic and earnest manner. *Inasmuch* (says he) *as ye do it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me.* And he has given us the highest encouragement in the promise of rewards, the most exquisite in their degree, and permanent in their duration.

Will you not then attend to the recommendation of your best Benefactor ? of one who died for you ? Or will you not give a part to him, who has given you all ? Recollect, only, that every instance of unkindness to a fellow-creature, is a refusal of your assistance to your most powerful Patron, and a rejection of the bounty which he offers you. Remember too the advice of the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus ; *Never*

*turn away thy face from any poor man, lest the face of the Lord be turned from thee ; lest in the day of judgment, when a restitution and an account of your talents shall be demanded, ye be rejected with the tremendous sentence, Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

V. 30.

Besides, the exercise of benevolence is not difficult, and in some cases not expensive ; for many of the useless luxuries of the rich, which they waste in wanton extravagance, or in thoughtless indifference, and the want of which they can neither feel nor regret, would be sufficient to clothe thousands of the naked, and to feed thousands of the hungry.

I am now to consider the proper objects of benevolence, as well as the manner of relieving them.

Charity, according to the enlarged and comprehensive principles of Christianity, includes all the race of mankind, however separated from us by laws or customs, by religion or politics. It does not divide us from the rest of the world, like the Jewish faith, with confined distinctions, with supercilious prejudices, or imagined superiority ; nor bid us, like the precepts of the pretended



tended prophet of Arabia, pursue the unbeliever, with all the fury of enraged and bigoted enthusiasm, or sheath the sword in the bosom, which we should rather teach to throb with the joyful tidings of peace. It seeks no empire over the minds of men, but that of righteousness and love. It bids us bind up the wounds of the unfortunate stranger, or the perverse infidel; and gain over the hearts of unbelievers, by all the graces of gentleness and mild persuasion. It has gone beyond every system of ethics, which philosophy could invent, or the unenlightened dictates of humanity inspire. It teaches us, that no enmity is to rob mankind of our affection, that we are to subdue no foes, but by the influence of forgiveness and love.

The only distinction, which the Christian religion teaches us, is the preference of virtue to vice. We are to love the good, and to pity the wicked. But whilst we are to embrace the righteous with a cordial affection, we must still be the friends of sinners; we must endeavour to reclaim them with winning mildness, and stretch the friendly arm, lest they sink into the abyss of sin, or the waves of everlasting death should overwhelm them.

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In the more confined connexions of life, and social intercourse, we should remove all the pain, and relieve all the distress, which we may chance to view, as far as our power will extend. And here industry will claim our first attention, as good citizens, and infirmity as men. When the poor have done all to deserve praise, to shun want, and to serve the public, they must have an equitable, as well as a natural demand on the opulent. And it must become the duty of those, who can assist their fellow-creatures, the brethren of their great Redeemer, to do it with the most complying cheerfulness; to restore those to prosperity, whom unforeseen calamities have reduced; to push those forward in the world, who love industry; and to reward and encourage the daily labours of those who deserve well. Imbecility will likewise claim a particular attention. The infirmities of age, the strokes of disease, or natural incapacity, must call for instant assistance; and we must alleviate that pain, however produced, which no advice or caution can prevent.

As far as it is in our power, we must encourage virtue; and do all, that is christian and reasonable, to discountenance vice. But when the unfortunate are visited by unexpected calamities,  
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it is then often too late to reclaim error; and immediate necessity will demand immediate relief.

We are to do all the good that we can. The field of charity is boundless; and therefore we must husband our talents with the utmost care. We must be cautious to give judiciously, lest we should bestow that bounty on the undeserving, which we may want for merit; lest we should encourage the indolence of the negligent, the profligacy of the dissolute, or the pertinacity of the abandoned.

But our charity is not to be confined to alms only. Money will remove instant distress, but frequently will not prevent future misconduct. Necessity is often produced by vice or improvidence. In such instances, our property will do but little; we must impart our prudence, if possible, to those who want it. We must counsel the incautious; we must reprove the negligent; we must instruct the ignorant, support the doubtful, console the afflicted, and encourage the penitent.

There is another kind of good by which we may assist our fellow-creatures; by our patronage and protection. And here, innocence and youth will have the most irresistible and urgent demands on our compassion. We must do all  
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in our power to preserve them from pollution, from oppression, and from temptation. The condescending advice and patronage of their superiors, is often the highest incitement to the industry of the poor, to the virtuous conduct of the youthful, and to the reformation of the erroneous. Men will be encouraged to walk in the paths of virtue, when it leads to honour; but that mind will soon grow abject, which feels neglect; and they will lose half the pleasure of virtue in this world, who have none to encourage their endeavours, to applaud their conduct, and to reward their constancy.

Another instance of charity is, to afford mental light to the uninformed. We, who are well instructed, should teach the ignorant. We should lend them our abilities, as well as our money; for that will indeed afford a temporary support; but not all the mines of Peru can supply the deficiencies of ignorance. Above all, we should show them the light of the Gospel, and teach them the knowledge of salvation. In imitation of our blessed Master, we should give sight to the blind, and light to them *that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.*

One of the most essential acts of charity, which we can perform for our fellow-creatures, is, to prevent crimes, and their unhappy consequences.



quences. With this view was the institution planned, which I have now to recommend to your assistance.

The institution of Sunday Schools is intended to promote religion and sound morals, to reform the lower ranks of mankind, to inspire them with a love of industry, and to correct the profligacy of the age. A design so commendable as this, it might be imagined, would meet with no opposition: Objectors however there are, though few. But, alas! there ever will be objectors to every good design, in this imperfect state! Some will be influenced by the pride of singularity; some will ever love money better than men; some will be too proud to adopt what they have not proposed; some will enter into no schemes but those of self-interest; some have nothing to spare, but for the gratification of their own pleasures; and some cannot feel for the wants of the world.

I shall endeavour to remove an objection which has been offered to this new scheme; and shall then point out to you the advantages which it is likely to produce.

It has been urged, that the inferior ranks of men may be rendered useless to the community by too much refinement; that by giving them  
inform-

information, you raise their notions above the servile occupations of life.

This idea, though plausible, is highly illiberal.

But it is to be observed, that morality can never be prejudicial to any society ; on the contrary, we have a divine authority, as well as the consent of reason, to say, that *righteousness exalteth a nation*. And they must be very little acquainted with the nature of education, who imagine, that occasional instruction, communicated by intervals, and that only consisting of the first rudiments of knowledge, will make men too wise for menial employments. But suppose, on the other hand, that you accidentally discover the first dawn of literature to latent genius, will not the effect be the most pleasing to yourselves, and useful to the public ? And may it not highly return the obligation in the future display and expansion of its natural powers, thus assisted ? May we not—for why should not imagination be allowed to indulge herself in such pleasing speculations ?—may we not hereafter sit under the spacious branches of the plant, which we have nourished and reared ? May we not enjoy the refreshing shade of that luxuriant foliage which we first taught to shoot, and sheltered



tered from the storm? It frequently happens too, that many of the lower order of men labour under considerable inconveniences, from the want of instruction; and we must be void of humanity, as well as religion, if we wish to exclude those from the comforts of life, who possess so few of its conveniences. Is it our duty to keep ignorance still in darkness? Shall we not rather impart our light unto men, and *teach them to glorify our Father, which is in heaven?* Shall we, who have enjoyed the light of the Gospel, intercept its brightness, and cast a shade on others? When God has said, Let there be light in the intellectual world, as well as in the natural creation, shall we keep it in utter darkness? Shall we greedily drink the copious streams of knowledge, and churlishly refuse them to the thirsty? Shall we imbibe instruction to profit ourselves only, like those unpleasant substances which absorb light? or, like the glorious luminaries of heaven, shall we reflect the rays which we receive?

That you may perceive the advantages which may arise from our plan, it will be necessary for you to turn your eyes on the miserable depravity, the deplorable ignorance, and the wretched profligacy, of a great part of mankind. Consider  
this,

this, and remember that a similar occasion drew tears from the greatest Philanthropist which the world ever saw. I do not wish to amuse you with complaints of the degeneracy of the age; but there are facts, which cannot be denied. Whilst too many of the higher ranks are lost in vanity, or distracted by dissipation, too many of the lower are abandoned to the pernicious pleasures of intoxication; which disqualifies them for industry, and compels them to seek a precarious subsistence by dishonesty. The Sabbath, the most excellent of religious institutions, and the most beneficial in its effects to men, is by the one neglected, and by the other profaned. Hence the children of the poor are frequently left to all the consequences of ignorance, idleness, and vice; are never awakened to a sense of their duty in life, or to the expectations and dignity of their moral nature; to the excellence of virtue, and to the promises of a future world. Now contrast the scene. Observe in our institution, innocence snatched from perdition. Behold those children, instructed in the truths of salvation, who were abandoned by their vicious parents, or neglected by their illiterate ones. Behold those taught to praise and worship their great Creator, who would else, perhaps, be sacrificed



ferred to profane the Sabbath, to wander in ignorance, or be left to the influence of vice. Behold praise issuing from the mouths of those infants, who had learnt only profanation and curses. Behold the great Creator glorified (in the language of Scripture) *even by babes and sucklings*. Behold those children presented to the public service, who would, in all probability, have been abandoned to wretchedness, to guilt, and to ruin.

The frequent execution of criminals, their abandoned and senseless conduct, their excessive and lamentable ignorance, call loudly on humanity to prevent (if possible) the miserable effects of vice. Now when can we begin, with a better prospect of success, than in the infant state of mankind? when the natural docility of that season of life renders them most fit for instruction; when vice is not strengthened into habit; when the mind may be moulded to any shape, and there is room for the most amiable prepossessions. The impressions of religion are too forcible to be defaced, where they are formed at an early period. Sin can never triumph over a well-formed mind, but by gradual approaches. So excellent and so durable is the influence of early wisdom! But the effects of habitual and

confirmed vice are so obstinate and inflexible, that frequently no conviction will be sufficient to deter the abandoned sinner; no persuasions to reclaim him. Could you excite in him a just sense of his error, he will awake only, like a man in a lethargy, to sleep again.

By instilling the principles of religion into the mind of youth, you lay the best security for the public welfare; you make those a blessing to society, who would else prove the pests of it. There is no better protection for the public, than the good principles of individuals. The terrors of the law will be ineffectual, whilst there are modes of evading them; and, in many instances, they cannot secure you from villany. But the law of the Lord, the light of conscience, improved and cultivated, will preserve your property from depredation, and your persons from violence. Vice first brings men to want, and necessity makes a trade of dishonesty. Whips or gibbets will excite feeble terrors in those who else know not how to live, and therefore do not fear to die. But in a virtuous and well-instructed nature you may place confidence; the fear of the divine laws, their invincible abhorrence of guilt, and their improved sense of its turpitude, will prevent the perpetration of those crimes,



crimes, which the laws may indeed chastise, but cannot always obviate. Their penalties are not nicely calculated to reform vice, or to make those good whom they may chance to punish. You can only hinder depravity from transgression, while your property is watched, or your person guarded. But by supplying men with religious information, by cherishing their good principles, and awakening their consciences, you set a perpetual watch over their souls: Fearing to wound their own feelings, they will never injure you. The fruits of ignorance are, *envyings, seditions, murder*; but *the fruits of the Spirit are gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance.*

It is no difficult thing to read the different fate of the instructed and the ignorant. The former set out in life with good principles, which serve to preserve them in its most dangerous seasons; and experience soon confirms that choice, which wisdom first inspired: They live respected, and die honoured. On the other hand, the ignorant are insensible of the excellence of a moral conduct: They want experience to preserve them from the contagion of bad examples; they know not their duty; for how shall they know, as the apostle says, without a teacher? They become the prey of malignant passions;

passions ; they sink into the arms of vice ; they end their course in a premature fate ; cut off by early disease ; or paying the tribute of justice in a wretched banishment or a shameful death.

Will you not snatch such from destruction, from temporal misery, and from everlasting death ? Consider, that many of the children of the poor are too often abandoned by their thoughtless parents, at their very entrance into the world. To save such from ruin, must surely be a glorious object ; to save such is the intention of our institution ; a design which angels may delight to view, and at which all heaven may rejoice. The best service we can render mankind is to save their souls ; and the highest praise which a Christian can deserve, is to have *turned many to righteousness : For he that converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

To save, therefore, the immortal part of men, will be the first advantage of our institution ; and to promote their temporal interest, the next.

Besides this, Sunday Schools may be the means, in some measure, of restoring the Sabbath to its long-forgotten dignity ; to that excellent use, for which it was designed ; and which the institutions of our church are so admirably



mirably calculated to promote ; to recall men to a sense of their immortal interests ; to give them a foretaste of those pure and serene pleasures, which will be only fully perfected when we enter on our heavenly sabbath, and eternal rest.

We may also possibly be the instruments of forming the minds of the poor to habits of industry, and of inspiring them with the love of it. We may correct a disposition to idleness, which is one of the greatest evils, both in itself and its consequences, to every rank and age of mankind. Those who do not acquire industry in an early season of life, seldom gain it at a more advanced period : But once attained, it is not easily lost. There is not a more painful situation, than to have no resource to fill up the hours of life. They who cannot find relief in wisdom or virtue, will too certainly seek it in folly or vice ; and therefore it is, that you see so many listless wretches, more fatigued with a vacancy of mind, than with the exertions of bodily strength ; flying to the most frivolous pursuits ; or flying from themselves ; and eagerly rushing into scenes of debauchery, to annihilate those precious moments, which are too few for the attainment of wisdom ; and of which he, who

is anxious to obtain the invaluable privileges of immortality, ought not to lose a single particle. We may also prepare the minds of the youth of both sexes, for the several stations in which the Almighty Disposer of events shall think fit to place them. We may initiate them in early piety and virtue, and enable them to become honest and faithful domestics, virtuous and quiet citizens, dutiful and useful subjects.

With such views, the children, whom we patronise, are regularly assembled every seventh day, to receive such religious and necessary instructions, as the time will admit. Sunday being a day of general leisure, our design cannot interfere with their secular employments. Those who labour daily will have their vacant hours well filled; and if occasional practice should not be thought sufficient to form habits of industry, it will at least point the way to it. They are taught the first elements of human knowledge, and the great outlines of religion; they are supplied with the Bible, the best and chief fountain of wisdom, and other useful books. We may console ourselves with this most pleasing reflection, that we are relieving their most important wants; that we are dispensing to them the heavenly food, which per-  
risheth



riseth not; that we supply them with the living water, of which he who drinks shall never thirst again; that we are clothing them in the immaculate robes of righteousness.

May you long continue in this glorious undertaking! May it afford you satisfaction through all the varied scenes of life, and consolation in the hour of death! And when the solemn trump shall call you to partake the reward of your labours, may they be crowned with the approbation of the righteous Judge, and merciful Redeemer of mankind! May he confirm your hopes with the rapturous assurance: *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Well done, ye good and faithful servants! enter ye into the joy of our Lord.*

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SERMON IV.

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*THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.*

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## S E R M O N IV.

*THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.*

LUKE, xvi. 25.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

**WE** have before us a very interesting parable. This is a figurative mode of instruction, adopted both by the Hebrew prophets, and the ancient philosophers of the Gentile world. Nor did Jesus Christ disdain to tread in the steps of those great men, who had attempted to enrich morality with all the sentiment which human knowledge could supply. By the same method, in which their feeble rays of uncertain light were collected, the fulness of his wisdom shone; impressed by an authority that was irresistible; recommended by natural dignity, by unaffected simplicity; and illumined by all the splendour of divine truth.

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This mode of instruction is at once engaging and comprehensive. To follow the explanation of a moral duty through all the subordinate branches of division, to learn virtue from the systematic arrangements of the philosopher, and to pursue the orator in all the variations of his subject, requires more powers of attention, and more strength of conception, than falls to the lot of the larger part of mankind. This method, however excellent, when judiciously pursued, can only be useful in proportion to the capacity of the hearer. The effect of a parable is not only more instantaneous, but more permanent. The circumstances of the relation are so connected with the moral inferences, as not to be easily separated. Instruction is retained by an artificial application of memory; and he who recollects the circumstances of the parable, will not forget the consequences of each incident.

The parables of our Lord have another advantage; that they are drawn from circumstances either of actual life, or of so near a resemblance to it, that they suit every condition and age of the world: They apply therefore to every mind. Events which have often happened, will always occur again. Errors supported by facts may be remedied on similar occasions;



casions; and evil avoided, by retreating from the paths which have been known to lead to certain destruction. The greatest and wisest Instructor which mankind ever heard, did therefore frequently address his hearers by parables: And the humble ministers of his word cannot adopt a more useful mode of teaching, than by enlarging on those admirable lessons.

For these reasons I have selected the parable of the rich man and Lazarus for the subject of this day.

*There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day; and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.*

This picture is contrasted by two very striking objects. In the one we contemplate the height of human prosperity, and in the other the extreme of human misery. It is to be observed, that the splendour of the rich man is not considered in itself as any defect in his moral character. A difference of condition is of the appointment of Providence. To support therefore our relative situations, must be a part of our duty. The sacred writings inform us, that

the Almighty has instituted degrees in society ; and the practice of mankind has ever been conformable. Wherever men have been civilized, or indeed even in an uncultivated state, subordination and command have been found altogether indispensable. The idea of equality, by uniform experience, has been proved to be visionary. Small societies may exist by peculiar rules ; but such systems will not bear extension. Whenever men unite in social connections, a mutual compact of adherence must, and always has been formed ; and some privileges of individuals must be sacrificed to the common security. A difference of station is therefore essential to civilized life. On these principles, to be clothed in purple, or fine linen, is not only innocent, but decent ; and in this circumstance the rich man was neither culpable, nor condemned. Excessive parsimony in the rich is a crime no less heinous than prodigal luxury, and is more contemptible. It is proper that dignity should be supported by such aid as is best calculated to create the reverence of inferiors. If men will not support their own consequence by means which are fairly in their power ; if, from a penuriousness of disposition, they will deny themselves the delicacies or the necessities of life,



life, they must be unreasonable to complain that they are not respected. For who will praise a poverty of spirit, which is useless to society, and from which no one can hope to derive advantage? by which commerce cannot be encouraged, nor the general good promoted? Popularity is to be gained by the practice of beneficial or splendid virtues; and all will complain of the man who withholds what all think they have a right to share, through the course of fair circulation.

Luxury, when guided by temperance, and made the channel of profit, is useful to society. It promotes the interests of commerce; and poverty is most beneficially assisted by the encouragement of industry. He does no good, he relieves no distress, who feeds the idle. The delicacies of life may therefore be innocently and laudably enjoyed, under proper restrictions. They are not however to be used wantonly, or by those who cannot afford them; and even those who can, should, in the midst of indulgence, remember want, and recollect that the refuse of a luxurious table may feed the hungry and the poor.

Of the other species of luxury, the proper use conduces to the order of society. However insignificant

significant in itself the external garb may appear, yet it has a considerable effect in society. It gives force, in a great measure, to the consequence of office; and natural dignity will lose some of its force without external aid. We are so used to annex complex ideas to human greatness, that such artificial modes must be applied to for the support of authority. The luxury of dress is then only improper in those who cannot afford it; and who by indulgence may be reduced to distress. Something beyond decency is requisite for reverence; and where vanity cannot injure itself or others, it may be allowed some licence. It is the error of inferiors, in the present age, to aim at objects beyond the measure of ability, and rather to encounter pecuniary difficulties, than be restricted by the considerations of frugality. Superiors, by an injudicious negligence, lose all distinction. Hence the rivalry between careless superiority and ridiculous affectation, produces very serious evils to society.

We have no reason to suppose that the rich man in this parable had obtained his wealth by unjust means, and had consequently incurred the anger of God; for on this head the Scriptures are altogether silent, and we must search for some other cause of his condemnation. We find



find it in the circumstance of his conduct to the unfortunate beggar. The distress of this unhappy object is very affecting. Wretchedness more deplorable can hardly be conceived. The miseries of poverty were rendered more than usually intolerable by disease; and that disease by want, not only of the indulgences requisite at such a season, but even of common necessities. To the poor, the inconveniences attendant on sickness are of the most complicated nature. Deprived of the means of subsistence, they are often importuned by numerous demands which are not foreseen, and which, if foreseen, cannot always be prevented. Under such depressing and afflictive circumstances was Lazarus laid at the gate of the rich man; and if any additional claim on compassion was necessary, it might have been found in the humility of his request, for he *desired only to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.* And could this modest petition be refused? Could he be denied so trivial a bounty amidst such abundance? Could any man be so unfeeling as to riot in all superfluous enjoyments, and court the artificial incentives of a luxurious appetite, and at the same time neglect the sufferings of a fellow-creature? Could any man be so lost to

a sense of gratitude to the Giver of all good, as to forget the sorrows of his afflicted children? Could any mind be so callous as to expand with gladness, when a human being laboured under a state of suffering so deplorable, which the refuse of his lowest domestics might have alleviated? Is not this description of insensibility disgusting in the highest degree? and does not humanity turn from it with horror?

It might indeed be urged, in defence of this unfeeling man, that he was ignorant of the distress of the poor beggar. The doors of the great are often beset with insolent domestics, who are fond of exercising the same authority over others, to which they are obliged to submit from the capricious tyranny of their superiors. Mean minds do not learn compassion from their own sufferings: To them the school of affliction is not that of humility. Misery therefore will gain no admittance to the great, where pampered insolence frowns, tutored by severity; where prosperity only gains the ready admission, which poverty cannot purchase.

It might on this idea be urged, that the circumstances of the wretched Lazarus were not discovered to the rich man of whom this parable is related. For who could dare to interrupt a scene



scene of festivity with tales of misfortune? Who of the sons of sensuality and riot, will allow himself leisure, or has a mind sufficiently unembarrassed, to reflect on the various miseries of life? to consider what numbers may be tasting of the bitterness of woe? who mourns, or who shivers with cold, who pines in sickness, or who wastes with famine, while the gay illusions of rapture pass before him? Who will turn from the banquet, where *the viol or the harp* resound, to meditate on the transient state of human things, or the bitterness of adversity?

Yet should all this be allowed, the conduct of the rich man may by no means be cleared from imputation of error; and the circumstances of the parable seem to imply, that it was not capable of such an extenuation. These pleas are related merely to show, that habits of insensibility to the distresses of our fellow-creatures, are an aggravation of guilt; for had the rich man been accustomed to acts of liberality, no churlish domestic would have dared to spurn misery from his door. Dependants generally reflect the manners of those they serve. And it is probable that Lazarus was daily laid at the gate, or, if not, that he was only one of many sufferers, who were harshly denied relief, or neglected by cold indifference.

ference. Of this we may be assured, that a feeling man will teach compassion to those who are below him; that his doors will be open to real distress; that on such he will suffer no menials to frown, or *send the hungry soul empty away*. Charity is an active virtue. It is not enough that we possess the will to do good; we should search for opportunities of exercising ourselves in acts of benevolence. We should be ready to hear the complaints of the poor, and to relieve them to the best of our means. The great Benefactor of mankind has set us an example of assiduity in the offices of kindness. A good man, who is blessed with the means, will not only assist the deserving, who may entreat his favour, but will search the habitations of poverty, to discover the modest distress, which shuns the public eye, *which is ashamed to beg*. By the encouragement of industry, and by rewarding indigent merit, he will dispel the horrors of poverty from all the dwellings of affliction, as far as his powers extend. The effects of his judicious liberality will circulate like a copious river, winding through a vast extent of country; dispensing health and vigour, refreshment and verdure, wherever it flows. He will not confine his bounty; but, to borrow an applicable



plicable phrase of the Psalmist, will see that there be *no complaining in the streets.*

To relieve all distress, may be as impolitic as it is difficult. For who shall satisfy the claims of the indolent, the inconsiderate, or the abandoned? But to hear all is practicable. To select with discretion, and to discourage imposition, will lessen the number of petitioners, and render the task of distribution at once more satisfactory and more useful.

From the preceding observations we may conclude, that the guilt condemned in the parable consisted in an habitual neglect of the duties of charity. And it may be here proper to remark, that the purple was a colour extracted by art from an animal substance found in Phenicia, and the other coasts of the Mediterranean, and was highly valued by the ancients; worn only by kings, or persons of considerable distinction. It is expressly mentioned in the context, to show the degree of the rich man's luxury. Thus he, who denied nothing to himself, which could gratify sense by the indulgence of appetites, false perhaps as well as real, had no feeling for the wants of others. Liberal only in the ostentation of vanity; in giving to those who did not need, nor perhaps deserve, but who were proper ob-

jects for the display of his magnificence ; he had no regard for worth. But this is ever the fate of prodigality ; by scattering its favours without distinction, it leaves nothing for us to bestow on those who may deserve our bounty.

Worn out by pain and affliction, *the beggar died*, and, in the metaphorical language of Scripture, *was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom*.

The course of the rich man too was in all probability short ; for the Scriptures go on to inform us that he *also died*. Intemperance defeats its own end. The indulgence of inordinate passion destroys appetite ; and when men no longer use the necessaries of life for the gratification of a natural desire, they surcharge nature, and disease then succeeds. Thus every vicious pleasure, at some period, meets a temporal punishment.

However different the condition of Lazarus and the rich man might be on earth, we find it most miserably reversed after death. The account is very alarming ; but as the picture admits of no heightening, I shall give it you in the words of the parable : *And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom : The rich man also died,*  
and



*and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.*

A short application is all that now remains.

The enjoyment of temporal blessings is innocent in itself. A cheerful mind bespeaks gratitude, and is no less the duty of him who receives, than of him who bestows. To delight therefore with moderation in the gifts of the Almighty, is to delight in him who gave them. But there are a few questions, which we should seriously apply to our hearts. Are there none hungry, whom, to the best of our abilities, we have not fed; none naked, whom we have not clothed? If your consciences can acquit you, happy are you. You may then go on to enjoy

the blessings of Providence ; for you will then experience an unadulterated satisfaction in them, which nothing else can impart.

And may He, who has given us all good things to enjoy, be your guide, your protector, and eternal friend ! May he bestow on you that comfort, which you give to others ! May he support you when the world, and all its pleasures, shall grow insipid ! May he preserve you when all other help is vain ! in all the time of your wealth, in all the time of your tribulation, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment,



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S E R M O N V.

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*THE PRODIGAL SON.*

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S E R M O N

THE FIFTH SUNDAY



## S E R M O N V.

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*ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.*

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LUKE, xv. 18.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him,  
 Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee.

**T**HE text is a part of a very instructive and interesting parable, which our blessed Saviour related in the course of his ministry. The circumstances are such as occur frequently in common life; and of which experience will furnish us with numerous and melancholy examples.

In this relation the great Teacher of mankind proposed two objects; of which the one related to the peculiar situation and expectations of the Jews, and the other to the general state of the world.

To oppose the arrogant and ill-founded pretensions of the Jews, who considered the only true God as their father, in an exclusive sense, and themselves the children of God, in preference to the rejected Gentiles, our blessed Saviour

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our teaches them, in this history of a prodigal and his prudent brother, that the universal Parent of mankind regards all his offspring with an equal eye ; that no claims can be allowed to spiritual presumption ; and that mercy will never be denied to sincere repentance.

*A certain man, says our Lord, had two sons,* but, as events proved, of very opposite dispositions. The elder was remarkable for consistency of demeanour, and a steady pursuit of unerring virtue ; the other was of warm passions, inconstant, impatient of restraint, sanguine, and volatile. Under the character of the elder is exhibited the Jewish nation, who had been selected as the favoured people of heaven, who enjoyed the miraculous protection of the Almighty, and the supernatural dispensations of his will ; cherished by an apparent partiality, of which they were jealous, and preserved by a providential interposition, which they little merited. But as the elder children of God, they looked down with arrogance on the rest of mankind, and proudly augmented the unaccommodating ceremonies which God had enjoined them, not to encourage spiritual pride, but for the support of their religious and moral conduct.

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In the character of the younger son we have a figurative description of the degenerate and apostatizing Gentiles, who had forsaken the love of their benign and true Parent, in the earlier ages of mankind, for the meretricious enjoyments of idolatry ; who had exchanged the privileges of reason for the pleasures of sense, and forgot the glory of the incorruptible God, in a stupid admiration of his corruptible works : Charmed with their effects, but insensible to the attributes of their Maker.

In the penitential return of the son, and the affectionate forgiveness of the father, the haughty Jew was taught, that however, like the elder, he might behold the mercy of God with fullen resentment, in Jesus Christ the dispensation of grace was offered to all, and that salvation was proposed by the common Parent of mankind to every returning child ; *to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.*

Having thus shown one signification of the parable, I shall proceed to treat of that which is more practical and applicable to the occurrences of life. Let us suppose the circumstances to be real.

*And*

*And the younger of the sons said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me ; and he divided unto them his living.* The young man, tired of restraint, incapable of delay, full of youthful presumption, weary perhaps of the admonitions of his parent, and elate with all the sanguine hopes which a lively imagination creates, now flattered himself with a thousand prospects of pleasure. The one he was impatient to put in practice, and the other to enjoy. Youth is too ardent to calculate or foresee impediments ; and in the fervour of desire, and the view of fruition, consequences cannot be weighed, nor danger apprehended. All objects appear to young minds easily attainable. The enjoyments seem to be at a small distance. They measure them, like eager travellers, by the eyes of hope. They never consider what dangerous paths, what steep precipices, or what rapid torrents, may be concealed in the vale of hours. They hasten on, busy in the pursuit, and insensible to danger. Some excuse for the impatience of youth will however arise from the moroseness and petulance of age. If many volatile children are desirous to explore the world, and embark on the dangerous tide of life, too many are driven from the arms and protection of  
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of their parents by rigid exactions, by unaccommodating humours, and by constant upbraidings. The world will furnish us with many melancholy examples of children precipitated into unhappy marriages, of the female part especially; and of the other into vicious company, or into hasty and ill-digested plans of life, by the harsh and unreasonable restrictions of their elders. Let that parent who dreads to find his child a prodigal, cherish him with dignified and conciliating affection. Let paternal love assume the appearance of exalted friendship; of friendship heightened by rational authority, and of affection that will not sink into weak submission; that acts on a steady principle; that will sacrifice nothing to improper indulgence, and that will yet yield every thing to just expectations. Let domestic comfort be more than mutually consulted; for he who is too earnest to seek his own ease at home, exposes the virtue of his child to temptation abroad, and sends him forth to the trial. Youth should never be compelled to fly from those doors which should ever afford an happy asylum, and open to the dwelling of cheerful tranquillity. Yet in some instances all this will not succeed; perverse inexperience will spurn at salutary advice, and confident impatience

tience will defy all restraint. Blessed above measure, and favoured by heaven in an eminent degree, are those fortunate parents who have no reason to lament the indiscretion, or to complain of the misconduct, of their children ; and wretched indeed are those who find their affection requited by unthankfulness, and all their care wasted on obstinate and wilful depravity. Ingratitude never stings so deeply as when it appears in the unkindness and disobedience of children ; and the highest joy a parent can experience, is the compliance of cheerful duty, and the return of kindness. Yet such is the imperfection of human nature, that too many parents know not how to value good children ; torment them with tyrannical exactions, and live as if they were insensible of so great a blessing.

Wearied with importunity, or through an injudicious excess of parental indulgence ; through a faulty fondness, or a weak incapacity for government—errors too common, and often fatal—the father consented to the romantic wishes of his son, and supplied him with his portion.

The consequence was soon visible ; for the younger son, in haste to partake of all the joys which imagination created, and which he now thought within his reach, would lose none of  
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the flying moments of delight. *Not many days after, says the context, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country; and there, as might be expected, wasted his substance in riotous living.*

And does not every fond parent pursue him, with apprehensive solicitude and with fearful presages? Does he not picture the dangers of the infatuated youth, thus forsaking his best friend, to try the world—a world whose interest it is to impose on inexperience, and to contract friendship, professed only for the purposes of deception? Let him who thus feels, remember that on himself may perhaps depend whether his child may be induced to make such dangerous trials.

The steps of dissipation are rapid; and these are greatly accelerated by youthful desire. But as the gay are seldom prudent; as the thoughtless are blind to the future, the giddy youth made no provision for an hour of distress. On such occasions the mind is dissatisfied with its own suggestions, and will not therefore think; because to think is misery: For those only seriously reflect on past misconduct, whose determination is to amend: It therefore goes on in its course till the last ray of light fails, and total darkness succeeds. What the unhappy youth

had never foreseen, or having foreseen, had not resolution to prevent, soon overwhelmed him : For the parable goes on to say, *when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want.* The circumstances of his distress need only to be related in the pathetic and beautiful simplicity of the sacred writings : *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine, and he would fain have filled his belly with the husks, or fruit of the tree, which swine in that country eat ; and no man gave unto him.* Though riot and excess destroy reason ; though, during the intoxication of intemperate pleasure, reflection cannot operate, adversity soon checks the course of indiscretion, and restores the mind to sedateness and reflection. Thus the young man, *when he came to himself*, that is, perceived the folly, and experienced the misery, of his course, in a manner expressive of his feelings, and which conveys to us a lively sense of the depth of his distress, exclaimed, *How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger !*

Full of these melancholy reflections, stung with remorse for his past misconduct, compelled by a dreadful necessity, and influenced by the



first suggestions of returning virtue, he forms a resolution, which adversity, and wisdom, the offspring of adversity, prompted: *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.*

Happy would it be for all young persons, whom passion or indiscretion mislead, if their errors were retrieved by such modest acknowledgments. The first step to amendment is the confession of error; and to resolve to forsake vice, is half to gain the victory over it. Good minds may sometimes become victims to temptation; but the ingenuous will not persevere in depravity. The most fatal impediments to reformation are sullen perverseness or timid irresolution. As the self-confident cannot be preserved, they are also with great difficulty to be reclaimed.

On his return, the penitent was received with an exemplary kindness. No ill-timed reproaches, no sharp remonstrances, were offered; no cold or indignant looks were expressed. On the side of the father, all was affection, encouragement, and joy; on that of the son, all was contrition, humility, and repentance. He who would recall

from error, must invite by conciliating gentleness. Severity may deter the guilty, but it will seldom recover virtue, when fallen. Such is the condescension of Heaven to sinners; and such should be our conduct to men.

While the poor penitent approached with a timid apprehension, *the father saw him when he was yet a great way off, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.* This circumstance strongly marks the amiable and forgiving temper of the parent; and the humble and penitent deportment of the son is no less finely delineated, by his immediate confession of error. In the midst of these inviting embraces, in the midst of these endearments, he repeats, with the surest signs of contrition, *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.* Such indeed is always the operation of kindness on an ingenuous nature. To such a temper, the tenderness of friends is more oppressive than reproaches. When generous minds experience mercy, where they had expected the severity of justice, they are more subdued than by punishment. They feel the consciousness of their own inferiority, and are more forcibly moved to reformation. They voluntarily apply censures to themselves.

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Lenient means are an encouragement only to the abandoned; but whilst any seed of virtue remains in the mind, gentleness must conciliate. It is not only more pleasing to allure repentance by countenance; but it is moreover the best security for its preservation. Penalties may deter the worthless; but gratitude only will retain those who are possessed of feeling.

From the circumstances of the history we have reason to suppose that the parent had long experienced the bitterness of grief; that he had spent many hours of melancholy doubt, and of fruitless tears, with respect to the welfare and condition of his child; that he had wasted his days in that tender anxiety, which considerate and virtuous parents only know, and the anguish of which can alone be conceived by those, whose hard lot it is to have imprudent or profligate children. To such the hours of life are all bitter and heavy. Hope points to no consolatory prospects; the future is dark and unpromising; and those expectations of renovated pleasures, which in our offspring flatter us with a repetition of the past, must vanish from the view. Every parent perhaps indulges the fond idea, that in his children his former enjoyments may be renewed, and all the better scenes of his

own life repeated. To this idea he constantly looks with an anxious and a fixed attention. Those errors which he has incurred, he promises himself to see avoided ; those advantages which he has missed, he hopes may be realized ; and those opportunities which he has neglected, he expects to have secured. By the aid of better counsel he thinks to make every good secure ; to teach the improvement of the future by examples drawn from the past ; and to add to the probability of success, a double stock of security, derived from his own experience, and the ability of his child. But in filial profligacy all these flattering expectations vanish. Those therefore who wish to avoid this extremity of woe, should teach their children the precepts of religion, in the season in which they are most capable of receiving the impression, and enforce the lessons of wisdom by example ; for his anguish will be of the most poignant nature, who has cause to reflect that he led his own offspring into the paths of depravity, and that he pointed the way to the ruin and the guilt he deploras. What peace shall be left for that man, who has reason to say, Had I been virtuous my child might have been so too ; but in my profligacy I have not only to lament my own errors, but the errors of those,



those, whom the first law of nature should have taught me to preserve.

Elated with the return of the penitent son—a recovery rendered still more promising by his restoration to virtue, to a sense of true enjoyment, and to filial obedience—the delighted parent cannot restrain his feelings. He calls for his best robe to clothe the naked wanderer; he prepares the fatted calf, and bids the house exult with feasting, and resound with music and with rapture.

In the mean time the industrious and elder son returned from the field, and inquired into the cause of this rejoicing; and when he had learnt it, he turned aside with sullen dissatisfaction. In the pride of virtue he had forgot to pity human frailty, and affords us a specimen of those harsh minds, which look on their fellow-creatures with severity, and allow for no errors but their own. To this cause of discontent we are to add also a mixture of envy. There are some men, who are elated by their imaginary security, and who think to increase their reputation for virtue by an uncharitable persecution of those, whom more violent temptation, and more unsuspicious tempers, have led astray. In the character of each of the two sons, in this

parable, we may discover a well-known resemblance. In the elder we observe morality joined to selfishness ; for some men are content to practise those duties only which are not expensive, and are satisfied with negative goodness. We see virtue ostentatious of its excellence, proud of its superiority. But this picture is not pleasing : For religion can never be lovely without charity ; it never can be gentle without mercy, nor pleasant without cheerfulness. The morality of some has more of cautious selfishness than of virtuous principle ; more of art than of grace ; more of the pride of the Pharisee, than of the meekness of the Christian. In the younger son we see inexperienced virtue overcome by the power of temptation, but recovering its rectitude, from the happy effects of a good disposition, and the elasticity of principle.

When the old man discovered the dissatisfaction of his elder son, he endeavoured to expostulate, *and he was angry, and would not go in ; therefore came his father out, and entreated. To which the other replied, Lo ! these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make ready with my friends : But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured*



*devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. To which the father answers with great tenderness and complacence, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine: It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

To this parable, and some preceding ones, is annexed an observation, which appears, on a slight view, to allow more merit and satisfaction to the return of a sinner, than to the constancy of virtue. *I say unto you, that joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.* It must be remembered, that this observation was addressed to the Pharisees, who imagined themselves to be perfect in all righteousness; to whom therefore repentance would be preached in vain. But let not the pious be discouraged by such an apparent preference. They may be assured that Heaven will rejoice at their perseverance, and that the returning sinner shall only be held in more estimation, when the impossibility shall take place of finding ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

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From this parable we may learn, that the benevolent Creator of mankind is ever disposed to hear the prayers of real and unaffected repentance; and that as we expect for ourselves the mercy and forgiveness of Heaven, we must pity the indiscretion, and forget the errors, of our fellow-creatures.

From the example of the prodigal, parents may learn the impropriety of a premature advancement of their children. There are many so vain and ostentatious, as to be very solicitous to push young persons into life, as it is called; that is, into a knowledge of its follies and its vices. Young minds are naturally captivated by trifles; and virtue and wisdom love retirement. These therefore cannot be found in the public haunts of thoughtless dissipation. An early acquaintance with the world is seldom purchased but by the loss of more valuable acquirements; and too early a taste of its pleasures will soon ruin the mind that pursues them. Let those therefore who love their own peace, and who value the happiness of their offspring, impress them with a sense of the superior worth of religion and virtue. This is the species of wisdom that will never fail them. This will secure them



them peace through all the vicissitudes of life, and exalt them to glory, when all human honours shall perish, and all human objects be forgotten.

I cannot omit to remark one fatal error, which arises from a too prevalent affectation of sentiment. Instead of watching the birth and progress of error in the minds of children, parents begin to form a character for them in their own imaginations; judge of every action by this fanciful criterion, and ascribe even their vices to imaginary virtues. Is a child weakly timid? This is tender feeling. Is he passionate or resentful? He is said to be possessed of great sensibility. Is he idle or vicious? This is volatility of disposition. Is he mischievous? This is considered as the effect of lively spirits. This kind of delusion may be amusing to the parent, because for awhile it flatters him with ideal qualities, and may serve to conceal unpleasant truth: But the deception is fatal; because it promotes the growth of evil, and confirms those habits, which might be prevented from acquiring strength. The subsequent uneasiness which it produces is very serious; for to be awakened to a sense of the depravity of children, is the most

most painful discovery which a parent can experience.

We often indeed condemn parents for the profligacy of children, when it is little known how many tears are shed, how much admonition is wasted, on determined obstinacy; how much in vain bestowed on insensible ingratitude; of how many nights the rest is broken; how many days are embittered by unfeeling inattention. Young persons are often not satisfied with the practice of vice: They dare to triumph in their guilt and their follies, and take a pride in insulting the unefficacious advice of their superiors. They are not content with ruin, unless they can put decency and virtue quite out of countenance.

Unhappily there is now such injudicious indulgence granted to young persons, that they soon assume the reins of government; which if parents first surrender, whom shall they blame but themselves? Gratitude is not the spontaneous fruit of the mind; and it is generally found that children are not content with their own freedom, but are willing to enslave those by whom they are emancipated.



If it should be inquired what means may prove the best preservative to youth? the answer can only be general.

The first object should be, to endeavour to convince young persons that religion is the best of friends, the most certain succour in adversity, the most pleasing companion in prosperity: That virtue is estimable in itself; that it is the truest foundation of happiness;—for what indeed is it but another name for that universal object of all human pursuits? We should therefore begin by creating reverence, and inspiring gratitude, towards the Supreme Being; which is the purest as well as the most unfailing fountain of morality. We should constantly endeavour to suppress a growing fondness for the frivolous pleasures of life. We should awaken in them a laudable ambition, by opening their minds to a prospect of futurity. We should teach them that this world is but a part of their existence; and that no desires are worthy of encouragement, which have not a better as their ultimate object. We should teach them that the great end of their being is to serve God, by employing their talents to the promotion of the good of their fellow-creatures; and that they are to look for an undoubted reward in another state.

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This will excite their most strenuous endeavours, and fortify their minds against the little vexations of life. He who places all his happiness in this world, must be disappointed, because nothing here is perfect. The present scene is not designed for retribution : But he who, in all his acts and designs, looks up for the approbation of God, lives, like the prophet in the mount, an inmate of heaven, though yet an inhabitant of the earth, exalted above the fluctuating and doubtful multitude ; placid and serene amidst clouds and thunder, amidst tempests and devouring fire \*.

Let us moreover fix in the minds of youth habits of industry ; remembering always, that at every age employment is of itself virtue, and idleness indisputably vice.

From the example of the prodigal, young persons may learn that obedience to God, and to their earthly parents, can alone secure durable happiness ; that the paths of sin infallibly lead to ruin and distress ; that when they forfeit the friendship of their heavenly Father, they forfeit all which can supply them with present enjoyment, or lead them to eternal bliss.

\* Exodus, xix.



In the instance of the prodigal they may see the event of a determined pursuit of error, and of the indulgence of those wishes, which are begot by the warmth of youthful imagination. They may see an experiment, and learn from thence the consequence which will result from similar trials; they may learn by demonstration that he, who in youth is prodigal of his talents, whether natural or pecuniary, will experience perpetual distress through all the succeeding scenes of life; that sorrow and disease are the inseparable companions of sin; and that true happiness can only be found in the reflections of a good conscience, and in that peace of God which is above all earthly joy, and which passeth all understanding.

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S E R M O N VI.

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*EXCELLENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.*

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SERMON VI

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LECTURES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

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## S E R M O N VI.

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION:

[Preached (by request) on laying the foundation of the New Chapel,  
Stone-house, Devon, September 1787.]

1 COR. iii. 11:

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which  
is Jesus Christ.

**T**HESE words were occasioned by some dissensions, which had agitated the new converts to Christianity in the city of Corinth, to whom St. Paul addresses the epistle of which they are a part. This zealous Apostle had endeavoured to establish the church of Christ amongst the Corinthians; and the work, which from the numerous avocations of the indefatigable preacher, had not been rendered complete, was strengthened and established by Apollos, an eloquent and converted disciple of the Jewish nation.

But as the minds of men are apt to fluctuate, where opinion is new, and where principles are

not well fixed or understood, some dissensions naturally arose on their preference of either teacher. The Apostle labours to obviate the inconveniencies, and to correct the misapprehensions, which might have arisen on a subject apparently trivial; but which might have been serious in their effects.—Often have opinions of no importance, and most lamentably so in religious disputes, destroyed the happiness of society, and ruined the peace, which revelation labours to inspire. To obviate these, therefore, the great Apostle of the Gentiles endeavours to direct the attention of his Corinthian converts to a more noble object; to suppress anger and resentment, and to recommend unity, by a dignified representation of the nature of the Christian profession. He reminds them, with an humility peculiar to all the first preachers of the Gospel, that all effect could only proceed from, and that all praise could only be due to, God. *I* (says he) *have planted, Apollos watered; but God giveth the increase\**. *I, as a wise master builder, have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon* †. And then he adds a caution to fix their inconstant minds, to confirm their doubts, and to remove their misapprehensions;

\* V. 6.

† V. 10.



*beware how ye build thereon, for other foundation, &c.*

The obvious tendency of the Apostle's argument is to confirm the authority of his blessed Master ; and I flatter myself it will not be considered as a topic inapplicable to the present occasion, if I endeavour to show you, first, on what foundation you may build your faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, What are its actual, visible, and undeniable effects, on the moral improvement and temporal happiness of mankind.

And here a subject offers itself to our contemplation, awfully sublime, and vastly comprehensive. We may observe a scheme of Divine economy pervading all time, and proceeding in an uninterrupted succession, from the moment of creation, to the present situation of the world, and to the final dissolution of all created things. We may behold the miraculous interposition of a superintending Providence regulating the affairs of his church, through successive generations. We may behold the Almighty Parent of mankind employed in a complicated, yet consistent government of his creatures ; raising mighty empires, and sinking them into obscurity, by the power of his word. We may behold *the nations*

*furiously raging, and the kings of the earth taking council against the Lord and his anointed\*.* But kings and empires fall at the command of the omnipotent Sovereign, the Lord of heaven and earth; before whom all the nations, nay all the heavenly systems, are *as nothing*. For thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands; they shall perish, but thou remainest; they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail†.

The arguments on which our holy faith is founded, are numberless and powerful. So consonant is it to reason, and so agreeable to the moral nature of man, that every sensible mind must daily add additional testimony of its veracity. To select, therefore, a few of the most popular, can only be the business of the present day.

The fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion is the assertion of some natural depravity in the mind of man. That this imperfection does exist, who can deny? And human philosophy has in vain endeavoured to account

\* Psalm ii.

† Heb. i. 10, &c.



for it, by various and absurd conceptions of the origin of good and evil. To such ineffectual attempts we must attribute the doctrines of the oriental philosophy, and other chimerical heresies, which disturbed the peace of the church during the earlier ages of Christianity.

If therefore a fact does exist, which the daily experience of each individual may prove, why should scepticism doubt, because it cannot reconcile the manner of its operation, or the nature of its existence, to its own ideas of truth?

That the human nature does experience some depravity, is a fact which every rational deist will readily allow. And if you are unable to reconcile this extraordinary circumstance, by any conclusion of reason, why will you not receive that information which can alone be authentic? You confess your belief in the veracity and the wisdom of the Almighty; you admit the infinite inequality of your own reason; and yet you will not believe, because you cannot reconcile his revelation to that reason of which you lament the weakness, and of which you acknowledge the fallibility.

The Scriptures inform us, that, by the transgression of our first parents, all the race of man was concluded under sin, as an inevitable conse-

quence. The Almighty Maker and Father of all created beings *concluded all in unbelief\**; but with the parental and grand scheme of goodness, *that he might have mercy on all†*. He therefore entrusted a revelation of his will to the world, by the mission of his beloved Son, who was to take our nature on him, *to bear our sorrows and carry our griefs‡*; that as *by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many might be made righteous§*.

And shall sceptics here again offer their ungrateful doubts and churlish objections? Is it not highly reasonable that the kind and benign Parent, who regards his earthly children with the most affectionate tenderness, and preserves them (to use the sacred simile) *as the apple of his eye* ||—is it not highly reasonable that he should express his affection, and declare his will, to the children of his love? That he should earnestly desire their happiness, and direct them in the pursuit of it? Human nature had long struggled, in the Gentile world, to know herself; to learn her expectations: And now that the Almighty has removed the veil; has sent his only Son, to show us the dignity of our moral nature,

\* Rom. xi. 32. † Rom. xi. 32. ‡ Isaiah, liii. 4.

§ Rom. v. 19.

|| Deut. xxxii. 10.



and the extent of our capacities ; and has promised to satisfy them with endless gratification ; shall we refuse the mercy offered us, with a perverse and sullen dissatisfaction ? Shall we ungratefully doubt that he can so love us ? Ought not rather our hearts to be warmed into gratitude, and kindled into love, by such stupendous instances of goodness ? by such an amiable condescension ? and by so affecting an instance of parental anxiety ?

But however sublime and comprehensive the grand scheme of universal salvation may be, the manner of its completion was no less splendid and glorious. It began with the transgression, and continued through all the successive periods of time, gradually expanding. At first it is faintly seen, like the early beams of the morning ; by degrees it grows more refulgent, till the whole scene brightens into excessive splendour. We trace it to the flood, when the race of man (one family only excepted) was utterly destroyed, and the face of nature, exquisite in perfection, and admirable in contrivance, was broken into a desert chaos. To the truth of this event, philosophy gives its consent. The vegetable and animal substances, every-where found, in a petrified state ; the marine productions, dug  
from

from places the most remote from their natural situation, and where they could not be conveyed; the unequal and various surface of the globe, and many extraordinary phenomena of nature, prove most indisputably that some such great event must have taken place, and that all created matter has undergone considerable changes.

From the time that Noah and his family leave the ark, and begin to repeople the desert world, a spirit of prophecy goes forth. Not a memorable transaction passes in the great theatre of the world, which is not foretold in the sacred writings; the rise and fall of successive empires, their periods of duration, and their destruction, are exactly described. The word of God goes forth, and Babylon, *the glory of kingdoms*\*, is no more. The pride of Tyre and Sidon fails. The stone, hewn from the mountains without hands, by which the kingdom of Christ is beautifully pictured in the sublime prophecies of the prophet Daniel, swells into bulk, and crushes the heterogeneous image. In a word, the history of mankind is wonderfully predicted in the sacred writings. We see one vast and consistent scheme of a superintending Providence in the transactions of the Jews and Gentiles. We behold

\* Isaiah, xiv. 4,



them irresistibly led as the instruments of his wisdom. Busied in their schemes of restless ambition, or insatiate avarice, they promote the designs of Him who produces good from evil, and directs the passions and pursuits of men to the promotion of his glory. But these prophetic declarations were not clearly understood till their completion. In the sacred writings they were nicely concealed, like the vegetable embryo, which has all its parts finely enveloped; infinitely minute, but wonderfully perfect. But as the little tree, warmed into life by the genial seasons, expands and spreads its *goodly branches*; so do the prophetic arcana of the Divine oracles gradually become more luminous and intelligible.

There is one circumstance, however, which fills us with awe, and stamps conviction on the wavering mind. Of all the numerous nations which have overspread the face of the earth, no such traces are left as of the peculiar people of God, and the descendants of Ishmael. The latter now exist in Arabia, agreeably to the sacred prediction, preserving their ancient customs, and fulfilling the character foretold of them; as we learn from the accounts of modern travellers, of undoubted veracity and perspicuity.

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The remnant of the Jewish nation, however, has been preserved ; though every circumstance appears to have militated against them. They were an inconsiderable people ; they were perverse and untractable ; they underwent various forms of government ; they suffered continual persecution. For some time they were led by the hand of Moses, of whose existence profane historians have agreed ; and whose character they have drawn, according to the account of Josephus. They spent whole years in immense deserts, and were sustained by a series of miracles—they found food from heaven, and water in the dry and barren land. They were often carried into captivity. The place of their religious worship was not settled till the days of Solomon, and the building of the temple. Even during their dispersion, and after the destruction of their city, and desolation of their country, according to the divine prophecies, they remained unmixed, though dispersed in every nation, preserving the same obstinate spirit, the same inviolable attachments to their ancient laws and customs, amidst persecution and distress ; like the drop of oil which keeps its particles distinct, though diffused on an ocean of waters, they are every-where scattered through every climate and country.



country. Here is a perpetual miracle ; you have only to look around you, and be convinced. If you are not influenced by this, *neither will you be persuaded though one should rise from the dead* \*.

The extent of prophecy is yet unlimited : Its truths are yet disclosing, and will continue till the whole scheme of Providence shall be complete, and time shall be swallowed in eternity.

That the whole scheme of the Divine counsel was complete in the mission of Jesus Christ, you must be convinced. Profane historians have given their testimony of his existence. Tacitus relates the manner of his death ; and Pliny describes the inoffensive conduct, the exemplary virtues, and the invincible fidelity of his primitive converts. His miracles no cotemporary endeavoured to deny ; though his sweet deportment, and heavenly conversation, could not secure him from the malevolence of envy. Now behold the Gospel established in defiance of persecution, and in opposition to the temporal interests of the selfish, the contempt of the proud, and the malice of the wicked ; and this too by its own intrinsic dignity, by its own indisput-

\* Luke, xvi. 31.

able veracity, and by its own winning and gentle influence.

On such arguments, and on such a foundation, you may build your faith in the religion of Jesus Christ. But I have been enabled merely to give you the slightest touches, and to offer only a few elements of its evidences. Let us now view it in that amiable light, which must ever endear it to the virtuous and benevolent; in its actual, undeniable, and visible effects on the temporal happiness and moral improvement of mankind.

It is no improper criterion of the truth of any system, which pretends to divine authority, to try it by the acknowledged attributes of that Supreme Being, from whom all truth must derive its origin. The character of the Deity will be impressed on his works; and therefore those doctrines which are to serve for a rule of life, have the best claim to sacred authority, which possess a natural tendency to render the human character most perfect. I have now only the practical doctrines of religion in view. Those more sublime and exalted representations, which discover the economy of God in the government of his creatures, which declare to us the awful exactions of the eternal justice, or treat of  
the



the unintelligible nature of the Almighty, are alone the objects of faith. Reason can only perceive the emanations of sacred truth at an infinite distance, as we feel the influence of the sun; but we are too far removed to judge of the nature of either. The light of the one is felt and perceived; but we reason with uncertainty on its causes. The light of the divine attributes we behold with an awful admiration; but we are lost in brightness: We cannot define their degrees, nor distinguish their parts. Like the prismatic colours they are beautifully luminous; but so blended that their gradations are imperceptible, and their limits indeterminate.

In such a comparison, the Christian scheme of morality will claim an eminent and unrivalled superiority over every system which the wit of man has been enabled to produce. Its conceptions of the moral dignity of our nature, the extent and warmth of its benevolence, the greatness of its object in the conquest of every baneful passion, are such grand and comprehensive views, as fill us with astonishment and admiration. The Christian hero is the friend and father of mankind; the disciple of Mahomet is the scourge of the innocent. The one spreads devastation and horror over the earth; the  
other

*other openeth his hand, and all things living are filled with good* \*. The one robs the mother of her child, and sheaths his cruel sword in the bosom of the beloved husband ; the other is *the friend of the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widow.*

But, to show the actual advantage which the world has derived from the influence of the Christian religion, we must draw a comparison between the effect of other systems, in circumstances nearly equal. We must select some ages of mankind, which have enjoyed a proportionate advantage of literature and refinement. And here it will be the highest satisfaction to benevolence to learn that the human mind is not in that state of degeneracy which some are too apt to imagine. Let us select the morality of Greece and Rome, as the parallel by which we are to judge.

The circumstances here are as nearly equal as possible ; for if the superiority of human acquirements is granted to the present age, it must be attributed to our excellent religion, under whose genial influence literature has been taught to flourish.

\* Psalm civ. 28.



In the political government of the Christian world, we now see the inferior ranks of men enjoy a greater share of liberty, even under arbitrary systems. The chains of slavery no longer gall the limbs of the poor ; nor does the wretched captive enjoy his life during the capricious and arbitrary pleasure of a tyrannical and cruel master. The spirit of commerce, influenced by the unrelenting and cruel suggestions of avarice, does still indeed, in some Christian colonies, afford us melancholy examples of tyranny. But benevolence lifts her voice against such an ungenerous and unjustifiable treatment of our fellow-creatures, with an honest indignation.—She may at length succeed ! She may at length prove the instrument of consolation !

Amidst the ravages of war, humanity has gained a wider influence. National contests are not now managed with that savage barbarity which characterizes the conduct of former ages. Rome sought the utter destruction of her rival state : Systematically inexorable, and deliberately barbarous, she pursued her savage plan of cruelty for a series of time ; nor did she rest till her vengeance was satiated in the utter extirpation of the devoted Carthage. In those ferocious ages the brave were not merciful. Victory was  
pursued

pursued with unrelenting barbarity. They knew the destructive arts of conquest; but they had not learnt the more glorious principles of forgiveness.

The examples proposed to their imitation by the absurd mythology of their priests, and by the animated descriptions of their poets, inspired them with a false idea of glory. They had not yet beheld the patient Son of God *offering his cheeks to the smiters* \*. Behold with what ungenerous triumph the proud victor drags fallen majesty at his chariot-wheels, stripped of all the enjoyments of royalty, of dignity, and wealth; admitted to the wretched privilege of life, to gratify the brutal pride of insolence, and to protract the duration of misery. Now turn your eyes to the more glorious triumph of the Redeemer of mankind. Behold him meekly riding to the sacred city, amidst the acclamations of thousands who had experienced his mercy, and whose bosoms he had taught to throb with the joyful tidings of salvation. Hear the loud halleluhs from the lips of the blind, whom he had restored to sight, of the dead he had raised to life, and of the blessed souls he had preserved from everlasting death.

\* Lam. iii. 30.



If we descend to an examination of their discharge of the private duties of society, we shall find them no less deficient. Behold the unnatural father, authorised by custom, stimulated by avarice, nor restrained by law, deaf to the cries of innocence, and regardless of that helpless state, which has the most irresistible claims on pity, directing the exposure of his child. Behold the unhappy mother, pressed by cruel necessity, giving up the new-born infant from the bosom which should shelter it, her maternal feelings violated, and her consent extorted to the horrid act of barbarity.

The persecution of the Spartan Helots, and the cruel exhibition of the Roman gladiators, are amongst the instances of ancient barbarity. How brutal must those have been, who could derive amusement from the dying postures of those miserable wretches! who could exult at their tortures, make murder a spectacle of pleasure instead of horror, and refine its arts into system!

In the more enlarged instances of social virtue, they were palpably deficient. In all the systems of ethics which have displayed the wisdom of ancient philosophy, where are those noble precepts of charity to mankind in general, and of the relief of the indigent, which adorn

the pages of sacred composition? Their precepts of general benevolence are few. Surely it is no unfair presumption to conclude, that what they forgot to inculcate, they had not learnt to practise.

Their ideas of friendship, however exalted, are highly extravagant. Confined to one narrow channel, their affections could not dilate into a universal love of mankind. Narrow distinctions, and supercilious prejudices, contracted their benevolence. The Christian historians have left us some examples of private friendship, but no precepts. The object of our faith is more grand and comprehensive: It embraces all the race of man, unites them by the reciprocal ties of good-will, and swallows all the little distinction of nation or sect, and by its endearing precepts renders each man to each the brother and the friend. It is a plan of benevolence, which stretches through all the different ranks of life, which includes all the various descriptions of mankind, of nation, of sect, of enemy as well as friend, which reaches through every climate, which is not lessened by distance, nor interrupted by the great barriers of nature, deserts, mountains, or oceans.

And



And this is one most admirable effect of the Christian religion, that it softens the ruggedness of nature, cherishes all the social affections, and warms them into active life. Insensibility, under its genial influence, like the hard rock struck by the hand of Moses, grows warm, and diffuses the copious streams of benevolence to all the thirsty flock of God.

Such are the advantages to society, such are the evidences, and such the foundation, on which we may build our faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ. I have only, however, been able to select a few instances. The time will not admit me to enlarge on the happy effects to society, which are produced by that tranquil disposition of mind which the Gospel inculcates; by the conquest of the turbulent and destructive passions of revenge, of pride, of lust, of ambition, and avarice.

Permit me however to point out a striking advantage, which we experience from the consolation afforded us in adversity. The Christian, animated by the certainty of his hopes, and shielded by the confidence of his faith, is not tortured by despair during adversity: Lifted above the world and its cares, the world cannot subdue his fortitude. Supported by a dignified

and rational philosophy, he reposes his hopes and fears in the bosom of his Saviour and his God ; and looks on the casualties of transitory things with an heroic fortitude, a philosophic resignation, and a rational indifference. The miseries of life were insupportable in the heathen world ; and those who were most illustrious in the sunshine of prosperity, sunk under the weight of adversity, and, stimulated by despair, were induced to seek a precarious relief in a voluntary death. Instances of suicide are indeed now too frequent ; but the perpetrators of this crime are viewed with horror, and stigmatised by disgrace. This sin against the great Author of life, is neither supported by system, nor encouraged by approbation.

It now only remains for me to draw a few inferences from the preceding observations.

It having pleased the Almighty to establish his church by such a series of splendid miracles and illustrious events, by the blood of his sacred prophets, and by the transcendent merits of the death and passion of his only and beloved Son, let us accept his mercies with the liveliest gratitude, with rational diffidence, with infantine docility, and with the most animated resolutions to defend the truth of his Gospel. But we of this church



church have the highest obligations of gratitude to the Almighty, for the glorious reformation which he produced through those happy instruments, of his providence, the venerable martyrs. To us the fundamental truths of the Gospel are fixed on a broad and immutable basis : They have been attested by the death of those of whom the world was not worthy, and they will continue to be preserved till they shall be ultimately confirmed and displayed in the glorious manifestation of the Son of God ; when the mouth of all wickedness shall be stopped, and the countless millions of the dead shall arise to hail his coming. Then shall we behold him no longer despised and rejected of men, but clothed in the glory and majesty of the Father ; then shall they tremble before him, who condemned him to an ignominious death ; and then shall all the enemies of the Gospel bow down to the sacred name of Jesus.

As we are now about to erect a place immediately designed for the worship of the Almighty, it may not be amiss to observe, that sacred buildings ought to be constructed with a suitable dignity. From the building of the temple of Jerusalem by Solomon, where the most minute circumstances of the structure, the ornaments, and

the manner of execution, were exactly prescribed, we may reasonably conclude it to be the will of God, that places immediately appropriated to his service should be constructed in a style of magnificence. It is an act of injudicious parsimony, which inclines those to spare expense in the ornaments of the house of God, who think no habitation too elegant for themselves. The symmetry and dignity of architecture has a great effect on the mind; and such is the nature of things, that external appearances have a forcible influence not only on the illiterate, but on men of refined understanding and enlarged education. Tawdry and unmeaning ornaments should be avoided; but dignity may be united with simplicity, elegance with propriety, and splendour with taste.

The object of public places of worship is to preserve a sense of religious obligation in the minds of men. The Almighty is in himself *all in all* \*, but *in him we live, and move, and have our being* †; and shall we not therefore exclaim with the wise Solomon, *Who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain him* ‡?

\* Eph. i. 23. † Acts, xvii. 28. ‡ 2 Chron. ii. 6.

Lastly,



Lastly, permit me to congratulate you on the pleasing prospect of being enabled to attend the worship of your Creator with satisfaction and convenience, and in a manner suited to his dignity ; a circumstance which has long been expected in this place with anxious importunity.

Piety may now look forward with a pleasing presentiment to those happy hours when she shall be enabled to enter the house of the Lord, and pour forth the acceptable incense of a grateful heart. There to indulge the pleasing idea—shall affliction forget her sorrow, and the bruised soul hear the glad tidings of peace ; there shall the tongue of praise be loud, and the heart of gratitude be glad ; there shall the righteous resort ; there shall the sinner be rescued from everlasting death ; there shall the feeble knees receive strength ; there shall the poor find relief ; the sick shall be healed, and the humble shall be exalted.

But soon shall these scenes of consolation open into inconceivable glory. When the tumultuous storms of life shall subside, and the days of our age shall cease, this anticipation of heaven shall ripen into more permanent and ecstatic bliss. The enraptured soul, freed from the gross incumbrance of terrestrial sense, shall expatiate in a  
wider

wider field ; its faculties enlarged, its desires increased, and its gratification complete. In the day when *this corruptible body shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality\**, the beatified spirit, in the exulting triumph of actual bliss, shall joyfully exclaim, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory†? Who now shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ? Nor tribulation, nor sword, nor death‡. For all things now are ours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or things present, or things to come, all are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's §.*

\* 1 Cor. xv. 54. † V. 55. ‡ Rom. viii. § 1 Cor. iii. 23.



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S E R M O N    V I I .

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*ON INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGION.*

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ON THE

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## S E R M O N VII.

ON INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGION.

ROMANS, xii. 11.

—Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

**T**HE Apostle, having observed in the context that the gifts of the Spirit, or, in other words, the preternatural talents bestowed on those who embraced the Gospel, were various, and partially distributed, proceeds to exhort his Roman converts to a diligent and unremitted exertion of the several powers with which they were respectively inspired. He enumerates many distinct and eminent duties ; to the earnest practice of which he endeavours to stimulate them ; and amongst other exhortations, recommends fervency in the discharge of the great and indispensable acts of religion.

Indolence, or indifference in the performance of our religious obligations, is, of all instances  
of

of inattention, the least defensible, both from the importance of the object in itself, and from the many motives which arise to inspire us with ardour. He who subscribes to the truth of revelation, and is yet negligent of performing its duties (to use its own language), affords us a tacit acknowledgment of his preference of darkness to light. Such a conduct shows that we have not resolution to persevere in the path which we approve, nor to observe precepts, though we cannot deny their excellence, and though we confess their obligation.

The interests of religion are infinitely more important than all other concerns. For what are the objects of a temporal existence, in comparison of eternity?

The duties of religion, too, are in their nature practical and laborious. Its promises are not to the careless and inattentive. The perfection of the Christian character is to be acquired only by perseverance and activity; maintained by vigilance and constancy. In a state of apathy we may as soon be influenced by the sollicitations of vice, as by the invitations of virtue. Whilst the mind is at rest between two opinions, it may be easily inclined to either; in proportion to  
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the present bias of wisdom, or to the impulse of present temptation.

There is also a greater evil. The advancement of moral or Christian perfection is progressive. He who is at rest gains no ground, but may be losing his stability; and as two equal forces can only balance each other, as one ceases to act, the other must prevail. He who flags during the contest, gives the enemy leisure to recover his strength, and to return to the attack with accumulated force.

The obligations of religion are founded on gratitude. We owe our existence to the Almighty, as the Creator of the universe: We owe all the blessings of life to him, as a spontaneous benefactor. Is not all that we can perform due to him, in return for such inestimable gifts? Ought not all our affections to centre in him, as the best, as the only perfect object? as in one who has an indisputable right over us? as to one, by whose reiterated indulgence the enjoyments of life are daily prolonged? We condemn the wretch who is unmindful of the favours of an earthly benefactor; shall we forget the immense, the stupendous bounties of our heavenly Father?

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But, alas! the means which should seem to win our affections, and to conciliate our preference, too often entice us from our duty, through our own indiscretion and ingratitude. The profusions of blessings which are every-where spread around us, those astonishing instances of his creative power, which should teach us the knowledge of his invifible nature, serve to seduce us from the Creator to the creature; to enchant our mental faculties, and to abforb our affections. We look up to the heavens, and gaze with infenfibility, or with an unprofitable admiration, at the glorious effects of his power and wisdom. We turn our eyes on the landscape around us, glowing in vivid colours, and framed with exquisite grace and endless variety; but we forget the hand which formed it. We forget the Maker, even while we extol the perfection of the work; or we forget thofe acknowledgments which can alone render our admiration acceptable. We rife to the enjoyment of flowing fpirits and of blooming health; but our cheerfulness is not the exultation of gratitude. We breathe the fragrant and falutary air; we hear the warbling of the feathered tribe; thefe all fpeak in *the voice and language that is among*



*among them* \*; but we have no songs of gratitude to give. We exult in the possession of numberless blessings; we boast of beauty, of strength, of wisdom, of wealth, to indulge in the triumphs of vanity, or the insolence of pride; but not to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

Many causes co-operate to produce these effects. The love of the world fills the heart, and leaves no room for the love of God. The gratification of sense indisposes us for abstract speculation. Eager to possess, we are not at leisure to contemplate. We pursue with avidity; we stretch the arm to grasp at all which the world has to give: We are distracted in the variety of enjoyment; and we forget to pay the debt which is the condition of our tenure.

But as the mind of man is thus prone to neglect its more serious interests, we must endeavour, as far as we can, to correct this fatal defect, by awakening attention to serious objects. The character of the present age seems to be indifference to religion. Permit me, then, to propose remedies, by analysing the error, and by animadversions on its consequences.

\* Psalm xix.

A general indifference to religion may be attributed to the following causes: To a neglect of a pious education of children; to a neglect of the public offices of religion; and to a neglect of its private duties.

It may perhaps be urged, that these are the effects of an indifferent spirit, which indeed they must be allowed to be; but to the rising generation they are causes. And when we consider a little the nature of religious principles, we shall find that a neglect of its duties will soon produce unconcern. The cause and the effect are therefore reciprocal. He who is indifferent in the pursuit of any object, will soon become careless; and he who is careless must be indifferent.

Now a disposition to religion is no innate principle of the mind. It results from the deductions of reason, or from the revelation of God. It flourishes in proportion as we are capable of more or less warmth; or, where natural fervour is wanting, is supported by reason solely; by a series of conclusions regularly formed, and properly applied. But as the expectations of nature could end only in doubt and speculation, the benign and affectionate Parent of mankind has been pleased to confirm the natural hopes of reason,



son, by an immediate revelation of his will through the evidences of the Gospel—his last and best dispensation. But here the operation of the human mind is still necessary, and still applied to; for, to render the declaration of the Almighty useful, and his laws effectual, we must believe that they spring from the fountain of truth, that they are dictated by infinite wisdom, and directed by perfect love. Hence faith becomes the instrument of establishing religion in our hearts; and we are induced to observe the divine laws, because we believe them to be founded on the immutable basis of truth, and confirmed by undeniable evidence. As therefore there are no innate principles of religion in the mind, they can only be acquired by foreign aid; they must be cherished and cultivated. God, it is true, may, by a preternatural interposition, enlighten the minds of men. But miraculous operations of Providence are rare; and we must consider indifference to it as arising from the same causes which produce inattention to all truth of whatever kind; to an attachment to present enjoyment, or to a powerful prepossession in favour of error, where the mind is polluted by vicious propensities, or darkened by fallacy.

But this is not the case with Christians who are educated, from an early period, in the principles of sacred wisdom. They are taught to reverence religion, and to love virtue, before they are able to perceive how excellent the one is, or how venerable the other. But when the mind begins to expand, and to perform its own intellectual operations, they discover the beauty, as well as the necessity, of holiness; and they are determined to persevere in those habits which they have acquired by prescription, and to pursue the path through which experience has conducted them during the unconscious period of infancy.

But as the mass of mankind is not capable of abstract speculation; as it is their business to act rather than think, they must owe their religious instruction to the information of others, who possess superior endowments and greater leisure: And therefore the Deity has wisely ordained in his dispensations, that some should be set apart who may be free from the distraction of secular employment or temporal pursuits, who may acquire the lessons of wisdom in retirement and learned ease, and communicate the salutary streams of divine knowledge to all his  
thirsty



thirsty and wandering flock. The method directed by almighty wisdom has been adopted by men wherever the Christian religion has prevailed. In obedience to the will of a divine Instructor, some of mankind have been separated for the noble purpose of diffusing the knowledge of salvation, and of instructing the ignorant.

Besides this, youth and innocence will have an immediate demand for religious information on those who are the authors of their being ; who will have conferred the benefit of existence to a wretched purpose, if they neglect to prepare them for that long and unknown duration of existence, which is to be extended throughout all eternity. Children therefore have the most indisputable claims of natural affection for instruction from their parents ; and they who neglect to cultivate their minds, to remove the misery of ignorance (and I am not now speaking of the frivolous accomplishments of the age, but of religious instruction), are more deliberately negligent and barbarous than those unnatural parents of antiquity, who used to expose the children, for which their avarice would not provide, to lingering hunger or to inclement skies.

Young persons, of both sexes, are soon initiated in the fashionable levities of the age ; but

are too often shamefully void of religious knowledge. Their susceptible minds are soon directed to the pursuit of trifles; to slight attainments, which are the food of vanity rather than the ornaments of wisdom; which glitter for a moment, but are not permanently useful. To encourage these, the gravity of age too often condescends to adopt what it wishes to recommend. But age and levity are awkward companions, and soon render each other contemptible.

Of those who are sent abroad to public seminaries, too many return with little knowledge, and less piety; too many debauched by practised vice, or ruined by fatal notions of temporal grandeur. The whole of subsequent life is too often poisoned by the false principles which young persons acquire from each other, where, as they must be, they are left to pursue their indiscreet inclinations. Every place of education where children are collected, when they are not under the immediate inspection of the instructor (and too often they cannot be in the intervals of study), is a picture of the world in miniature. Tyranny, pride, passion, rule with despotic sway; and every evil propensity and habit is acquired, which has a tendency to disturb the future transactions of life. The difficulty of imparting religious



ligious knowledge in large seminaries, and the numerous objects they have to attain who are engaged in forming the minds of youth, renders it more necessary for parents themselves to inspire their children with an early love of religion and virtue: And, what is of the greatest importance, they must themselves set the example; without which, all instruction will lose much of its effect.

Another cause of increasing indifference to religion is, the neglect of its public offices.

On this head I shall not long detain you, since my present object is merely to offer a few observations. The Almighty seems to approve of open demonstrations of the affection of his creatures, and therefore, under the Jewish economy, and since under the Christian dispensation, public worship is recommended by precept, and encouraged by example; and has accordingly been considered as indispensable. But Omnipotence can receive no addition of glory from the praise of man; and we must therefore attribute the direction of public worship to the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. He knows our imperfection and our imbecility. He foresees that a sense of obligation and duty would insensibly escape from us, unless it should be

kept alive by repeated acknowledgments. Absence will imperceptibly lessen the force of human affection; and he will soon lose his reverence for the Deity, who forgets to pay him the debt of gratitude.

The duties of the Sabbath are admirably calculated to impress the mind with awful ideas of religious obligations; to abstract us from sensual pleasures or temporal pursuits; and to recall the affections when they begin to wander from the paths of rectitude. A Sunday well spent is productive of the highest spiritual improvement, and will bring the mind to such a serene and pacific state, as can only be understood by the experience of those who perform its duties with reverence and attention. After the fatigue of a busy week, the soul retires to its rest in sacred meditation and in holy ease. The boisterous storms of life subside, and a solemn calm succeeds; soft as the still evening after a tempestuous day. The man who neglects the duties of this institution, will find his sense of religion gradually decay. And how wretched must that mind be which never looks into its own state? which is ever on the wing in search of pleasures that will assuredly fade, and is unmindful of the change it must undergo?

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A general indifference to religion may be attributed to a neglect of its private duties. These are, family devotion, secret addresses to the Deity, and the study of the Scriptures; all of which have a powerful effect on those who practise them, as well as on others from their example.

Family devotion, it is to be feared, is very generally neglected. There are many professors of Christianity who never assemble their household for prayer. But would it not at least be politic to inspire your domestics with a sense of higher duties? Have you a sincere affection for your offspring? Surely then you would impress them with an idea of obligation to their heavenly Parent, and thereby secure their obedience to yourselves.

Meditation and prayer in retirement are no less requisite from a rational being. But, alas! there are too many who retire to the rest of the night, without returning thanks for the mercies of the past day; many who usually sink into sleep, little considering whether they may awake to time or to eternity. There are too many who descend from their chambers to the enjoyment of numberless blessings, without the least reflection on the Author of them; and begin the day  
without

without imploring that assistance which can alone render their honest endeavours successful, or crown their wishes.

The sacred writings are seldom read. But certainly this might be done for amusement, if with no higher view; and in this respect the finest taste may be gratified. They are in conception sublime, and in language expressive. In the Gospels may be found what is more worthy of attention—a beautiful simplicity of narrative. Truth is taught without the ostentation of ornament, and delivered with unaffected energy; and in its doctrines the good and the wise may find all that can raise their affections to the best object, and satisfy the expectation of a being, who hopes for the enjoyments of immortality. But when the mind is distracted by temporal cares, or engaged in frivolous amusements, it becomes incapable of seriousness; is indisposed to receive the lessons of wisdom, and is indifferent to every object which is not light or sensual.

To a neglect of these duties we may, undoubtedly, in a great measure attribute indifference to religion. Permit me then to exhort you, if you are desirous of promoting its true interests, to correct all levity and negligence, as  
well



well as all impurity, in your conduct. Consider yourselves as born to an immortal interest. Consider the world and all its possessions as temporary. Reflect that you should be the spiritual directors of your children, and of your domestics. The rich have a considerable influence over the poor in the various characters of masters, or patrons, or benefactors. Remember that your good example may lead many to happiness; that your bad practice may seduce them into the paths of destruction. With a wise use of your possessions you may live blest yourselves, and be a source of blessedness to others; and then your present pursuits will be crowned with the approbation of the Judge of the world. You may rejoice in the hope of your own salvation, and cause heaven to rejoice for the numbers you have saved.





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S E R M O N   V I I I .

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*ON PRIDE.*

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SERMON

FOR THE



## S E R M O N VIII.

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ON PRIDE.

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ROMANS, xii. 3.

For I say unto you, by the grace of God, that is given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly.

**I**N these words we are exhorted to avoid a species of offence, which is highly displeasing both to God and man. The Scriptures abound in cautions against pride; and the Christian religion in all its precepts, and in its general tendency, dissuades us from the indulgence of so odious a vice. To mankind it is offensive in the highest degree; for even the proud will not allow the indulgence of the passion in others. I shall therefore spend the present opportunity in an attempt to dissuade you from an error which meets with such general disapprobation; and perhaps a more useful topic cannot be advanced. For though to some the discussion of moral duties

ties appears but a cold discharge of the sacred office, nothing can be more profitable to the hearer than occasional instruction of this nature. He will conduce more to the end of religion, and the benefit of mankind, who endeavours to correct their daily errors, to remove the perpetual causes of disorder and disquietude; who endeavours to bring men to the true and benign temper of the Gospel; than he who labours to rectify their opinions on disputable and merely speculative doctrines. The example of our blessed Saviour in his moral discourses on the mount, and on other occasions, leaves us no doubt of the nature of the instruction which is most useful to mankind.

But, because pride is nearly allied to vanity, and as some arguments may be applicable to both errors, it will be useful to draw a parallel between them, that their similarity or their disagreement may be obvious: We shall then more distinctly be enabled to discover those indirect paths, which terminate in either inconvenience.

Of the two vices pride is the most odious; for to this, vanity is comparatively innocent. Pride seeks its own gratification at the expense of others; it wishes to occupy the space to which they have a right, and is ever in a state of dilatation.

Vanity



Vanity often attains its own ends in the gratification of other men; and pleases itself by pleasing the world. Pride aims at surpassing its superiors, insults its equals, and tramples on its inferiors. Vanity will often be content to be inferior in many respects, if you allow it but indulgence in a single one; and that too often in a point at which envy need not repine. Pride is disdainful and rude; vanity frequently courteous and obliging. Pride is always offensive; but at the presumption of vanity we are often more ready to smile than to conceive anger. Pride provokes our rage; but vanity only our contempt. There is an ostentation in both; but the exultation of vanity is more good-humoured. Pride wishes to excel, in order to depreciate your merit; vanity only to raise itself. Pride is never accompanied by true good-nature; vanity sometimes possesses this quality to an excess. There is an intemperance of vanity which may grow disgusting; but this disgust will never give you half the pain which you experience from the wounds inflicted by pride. Pride steps forth glorying in its own gigantic strength, and challenges your submission like the Philistine, who daily defied the armies of the living God. Vanity walks awkwardly, like the stripling David,

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oppressed

oppressed by the weight of his armour, and by the size of the weapons which he had not strength to wield.

If we define pride, we shall find it to be a quality of the mind which claims respect on some real or imaginary superiority; and which, at the same time that it demands attention, is ready to pay no deference to others: For though we sometimes meet with proud persons, who appear condescending, we shall soon discover that this is a fictitious species of humility, calculated rather to repel familiarity, than to promote it. Men, who are conversant with the rest of their fellow-creatures, cannot always appear austere, or act with insolence. The proud are conscious that such a conduct would render them universally detested and shunned. gain, very few can bear total solitude. Every mind must have some support on which it may occasionally repose; some counsellor, to whom it may apply for consolation in distress, or for approbation or advice in dubious cases. We have all occasionally a want of assistance. There are many conveniences which others can supply, and which we cannot procure for ourselves. What shall the proud then do in such circumstances? How shall they approach those to whom they are under



under the necessity of applying? for I have now principally in view those objects, which are only to be obtained through the intercourse of friendship or civility. On such occasions the proud man steps forth to meet you, not with the cordiality of affection, but with the suspicion of one who reconnoitres an enemy; who is ready to forbid your approach to his citadel; or, if you are permitted to enter, it is with the distrust and circumspection which admits you on no equal terms. In the condescension of such there is an air of superiority, which always informs you that every mark of their kindness is of the highest value, and that it is expected to be received with all the gratitude which great benefits deserve. For this reason, too, you commonly see the very proud associating on more familiar terms with those who are much their inferiors. They love sometimes to descend from the painful summit of pre-eminence—for all the contests of ambition are painful. They wish to throw off restraint, and to enjoy the luxury of ease; to repose with persons who will yield them a ready and acknowledged deference. They are desirous to exercise their rudeness where it may be borne with impunity; where they can tyrannize without control, and gratify a cowardly malice

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where there cannot be retaliation. Hence every proud person has his dependant, his submissive flatterer; the staff that may support him in the hour of languor, or the mark at which he may aim his insolence without opposition, whenever he chuses to indulge it.

Pride is a vice of which the greater part of mankind are commonly accused; and are not, perhaps, accused undeservedly. Every mind has some ambition; and if this is not employed on important objects, it is misplaced on those which are trivial. As every man claims some attention, proportionate to his imagined consequence, it requires a large share of prudence, or virtue, to keep this exaction within proper bounds. Yet, though many are not without reason accused of pride, every such character has some few companions who are ready to deny the charge, and to allege, as an instance, the freedom which they themselves enjoy with the accused. But it should be again remembered, that as no man can live altogether in solitude, the proud must have a few intimates; and how shall these be obtained but by partial kindness and occasional courtesy? These qualities must therefore be affected when they are not real; and the familiars of the proud will therefore be  
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either such a few of their equals as will agree to enter into a mutual compact and interchange of adulation, or such of their inferiors, as are content to purchase attention by submission and flattery; to bask in the sunshine of grandeur, and to feed on the slender gifts of parsimonious condescension.

As pride has been defined above to be the claim of real or imaginary importance, it must necessarily create great disorder and disquietude. If our pretensions are just, men will be even here unwilling to allow them in proportion as we are urgent; for the jealousy of self-love will interfere with our demands; if our claims are ill-founded, they will be rejected with disdain; for who but the mean or the weak will satisfy unreasonable requests? Yet it must be confessed, that there is a sort of assumption which too often succeeds, where real modesty and merit fail. The impudent are obtrusive, and gain their objects by undaunted perseverance. Modesty is on many occasions incapable of action; and, like the poor impotent man who lay at the pool of Bethesda, watching an opportunity to plunge, is ever disappointed, and finds itself supplanted by forward presumption.

Let us now consider the objects which produce pride, and we shall see the weakness of its pretensions.

There is a class of men who are proud of their relative situations in life; but on this occasion we shall seldom have reason for arrogance. Some are born to eminence, and can therefore claim no merit from the accident. Those who attain an elevated station from real desert, spoil the effect of their virtues by over-rating their consequence.

Ostentation is sure to provoke envy. He who demands adulation, deprives the world of the pleasure of giving it; for the favours which kindness would spontaneously bestow, are a tax when exacted. Besides this, whenever we boast of our superiority, we insult others; and though many would be ready to pay all due deference to exalted characters, none can be pleased to have their inferiority rendered conspicuous. We must remember, that, in proportion as we exult in our elevation, we remind our inferiors of their inequality, or misfortunes.

These observations will apply to those who value themselves on riches, or any temporal pre-eminence. Wealth is obtained either by our  
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own labour, or by inheritance. . Of those who possess it by their own acquirement, many will find their vanity checked by one reflection, that to attain it they have perhaps forfeited what is more valuable—a good conscience.

Again: To curb the insolence of man, the Almighty has given such an instability to all human things, that they are in the highest degree uncertain. Few generations are successively great or rich. One hoards, and the next almost infallibly squanders; and yet, from the pain and the fears in possession, and the insipidity of dissipation, neither enjoys. The goods of this world are in a constant fluctuation, like the air or the sea. What is slowly accumulated, often descends in an instant shower; and so uncertain are all temporal possessions, that an attempt to secure them, is like an attempt to arrest the current of a river, or to preserve fluids from evaporation. But many who affect riches, have little reason for the indulgence of their vanity, and are not to be envied, when it is considered that their wealth is imaginary. To support appearances, they live in fictitious gaiety; in a state of splendid distress; in an attempt to cover that poverty from the world, which they cannot hide from themselves.

There is another accident on which men are apt to value themselves—on nobleness of descent. There is nothing more weak or vain. There is nothing which confers so few solid comforts; for all that it can bestow, independently of concomitant circumstances, is merely imaginary: For riches will often purchase with greater certainty, and more effectually, all the respect, all the consequence we can claim from birth. It neither confers a better constitution, or more dignified sentiment; more strength of body or mind; more virtuous or amiable dispositions. Of those who thus boast, many live on the credit of their ancestors, without any intrinsic merit. Many by their weakness disgrace their origin, and are living examples of the decay of human greatness. Nobility, unless accompanied by superior virtue, is despicable; for what can be more contemptible than the degeneracy of virtue?

Of mental abilities or knowledge, little need be said; for true wisdom is unassuming. It is common for those who know least, to value themselves most. The pride of learning is the proof of the weakness of all human attainments; and may at once supply consolation and triumph to ignorance.



But how weak are all the pretensions of pride! for death is every moment undermining the schemes of ambition, and in a short, a very short period, a few feet of earth, a narrow grave, is all that the proud or the vain can possess. *And who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou didst not receive it*\*? as the Apostle observes. That good Providence who raises you to a temporal elevation, gives you no extraordinary marks of natural superiority. You enjoy not more health, or strength, or beauty, than the poor; nay, in these, they have frequently the advantage of their superiors. In the sublime writings of Isaiah, is a very grand and elevated description of the fall of greatness. The king of Babylon is supposed to descend to the royal sepulchre of his predecessors, where they lie entombed in funeral pomp. At his descent they all arise to receive the new visitor of the mansions of the dead, and exclaim, *Art thou become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols; the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen*

\* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

*from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning? How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations \* ?*

It must be a very mortifying circumstance to the proud, to reflect on the number of human beings who have come into existence, and who have paid the debt of nature, since the creation of the first man. While a person considers himself individually, or compares himself with a few less elevated, he naturally swells with imaginary importance. It is reported of the Persian invader of Greece, that he wept on reviewing his numerous troops, and reflecting, that after a few years not one of those millions of mortals would be numbered in existence. The shortness of life, and the instability of all human expectations, must have made a forcible impression on his mind. In the same manner would the proud be mortified, by attempting to form a calculation of the multitudes who have glittered in the transient day of human life, and sunk into long oblivion ; who have for a while filled the world with horror, or have basked in the sunshine of vanity, and have then sunk into the dark night of death, unregarded and forgotten. Let us then extend our view from this world to those

\* Isa. xiv. 10—12.



infinite systems, which the astronomer teaches us to be filled with multitudinous orbs, and to be crowded with myriads of created beings. Does not the human mind shrink at the idea of its own relative insignificance? Does it not conceive at once an awful, yet an amiable, a sublime, yet a tender, idea of the greatness and the goodness of the Almighty Creator, for ever directing, blessing, and ruling his infinite works? Let us next look forward to the final day of judgment, when countless millions shall tremble at his presence, confounded with awe, and apprehensive with expectation, of the sentence which is to determine their eternal fate; alone distinguished by virtue, and only exalted by mercy, and not by justice. Where now is the pride of life? Where is the boast of the vain? or the strength of the mighty? *Lord! what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him*\*?

Having briefly treated on the modes by which pride operates, I must in general observe, that it will be attended with a thousand inconveniences; for as the world is ever disposed to resist its claims, it must subject us to daily mortification

\* Ps. viii. 4.

and disappointment. Your own experience in life will afford you many painful instances of this kind ; and there are two related in the Scriptures which are remarkable. The one is in the history of Haman, who was not content with the highest honours, because the ceremony of respect was denied him by Mordecai, who sat at the door of the palace. The schemes of revenge and resentment which he formed in consequence, ended in his own destruction. The other is that of Naaman, the proud commander of Syria, who refused to be cured of a lingering distemper, because the Prophet omitted the ceremony of coming forth from his dwelling to receive his visit ; but when his resentment cooled, he found the necessity of submission, and enjoyed the benefit of compliance. Of his arrogance we have a striking example ; and in the conduct of the Prophet we have an instance of the highest dignity ; of the triumph of independent virtue over the folly of pride, and the insolence of power.

Let me now address you with a more solemn, with a nobler example, which we cannot contemplate without the deepest veneration. Look to the Author of your religion ; the humble Jesus !



sus! *Learn of me*, says he, *for I am meek, and lowly of heart* \*. Behold him! and you cannot conceive more of exalted dignity; you cannot conceive more of humility. Behold him entering the holy city, amidst the acclamations of thousands, yet meek and unassuming! Did the poor approach him? he enriched them with *treasures which neither rust nor moth can corrupt* †. Did the ignorant seek him? he received them with gentleness, and taught them *such words as never man spake* ‡. Did the humble, the contrite, the afflicted, or the sick, draw near to him? he accepted them with joy; he healed their diseases; he relieved their sorrows. He fed the hungry with *bread from heaven*, and the thirsty with *rivers of living water* §. Did infants press forward to view him? he condescendingly *took them in his arms, and blessed them* ||. Did the proud or the rich apply to him? alas! they *went away sorrowful* ¶. To the one it was a painful condition: *He that is least among you all, shall be great*, i. e. *great in the kingdom of heaven* ††. To the other still more hard were the terms of

\* Matt. xi. 29.

† Matth. vi. 19.

‡ John, vii. 46.

§ John, vii. 38.

|| Mark, x. 16.

¶ Luke, x. 23.

†† Luke, ix. 48.

admission! *Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor* \*.

Let us then endeavour to pursue, though at a distance, the lowly steps of our great Master and Redeemer. Let us ever keep in view the vanity of all distinction that is merely human; remembering that the great and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unwise, must together go down to the grave; that only virtue possesses true dignity, and that no qualifications are really valuable which may not profit us in the day when many of *the poor* and the humble *shall be filled with good things, and many of the rich and the proud shall be sent empty away* †.

\* Luke, xviii. 22.

† Luke, i. 53



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S E R M O N IX.

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*ON A FUTURE STATE.*

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3 E R M O N

ON A FINEST STATE



## S E R M O N IX.

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*ON A FUTURE STATE.*

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[Preached, by request, at St. George's Chapel, Stonehouse, before the Society of Free and Accepted Masons, on Tuesday Evening, Sept. 28, 1790, being the time appointed for the interment of his late Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, Grand Master of England.]

1 Cor. xv. 53.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

**T**HE most awful contemplation which can employ the human mind, is of that dissolution from which none are exempt : A state which unassisted reason views with uncertainty, and concerning which it is involved in the most anxious and apprehensive suspense ; a state at which nature shudders, but to which it is every moment insensibly approaching, and which whilst it fears, it knows not how to avoid.

From the first moment of life we are progressively advancing to the close of it ; growing mature merely to decay ; hastening to the point  
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which we most dread, and flying from the enjoyments we are most anxious to secure. We attain knowledge and wisdom, and soon lose them in that place of silence where all human acquisitions are useless. We gain wealth and possessions soon to forsake them, and *return naked as we came* \*. We struggle to obtain what no labour can secure, and pursue that, which, when obtained, we must be sure to lose.

There is no subject which has more employed the minds of men, than the state which is to succeed the dissolution of the body ; and there is no subject in which we can be more interested. The natural love of life has taught the most illiterate to expect, and the most unenlightened to hope, that there is an immortal part which shall survive the wreck of nature, and that *if our earthly house were dissolved, we have a building of God ; an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens* †. The hope of immortality has both amused the unexpanded mind of the savage, and exercised the skill of philosophy. In every age, in every state of mankind, the expectation of futurity has been cherished ; and the rewards or punishments annexed to the untried scene of things, have excited the virtue, or

\* Job, i. 21.

† 2 Cor. v. 1.



roused the fears of mortality. In uncultivated society, some humble hope of uninterrupted happiness has taught the savage to dare to die, and to aspire to those rewards which suit the ferocious spirit of a barbarous and unformed mind. In more cultivated society, unassisted reason has made few discoveries; and those vague and uncertain. Even philosophy has been able to attain little; and her researches have soon ended in wild and doubtful speculation. She has caught the tremulous and undefining dazzle of a meteor, and has suddenly been lost in total darkness. In the mythology of the most enlightened nations we can trace philosophy, but trace her through a short path only; and the future scene is soon adorned by the elegant but unsubstantial fictions of poetry. Amidst a confused and heterogeneous mass, the attractive power of reason is too weak to select much which is satisfactory; and the Author of nature has fixed such impassable bounds to the human mind, that if it disdains to apply to the true fountain of wisdom, it shall know nothing of itself.

From revelation then only can we expect that information which is to strengthen our hopes, to give certainty to our expectations, or ground for

our fears; and the declarations of God have confirmed the suggestions of nature, but cleared them of all which is fantastical, and only gratified them where it is necessary that they should be gratified. To this it has added such information as the light of nature did not predict, and could never confirm. Reason encourages us to hope that this life shall be succeeded by a better; and this hope is consummated in the declaration of Jesus Christ, *that he who believeth, though he were dead yet shall he live, and that whosoever liveth and believeth in him shall never die* \*.

As the speculations of men are often more curious than useful, much nice disquisition has been employed in endeavouring to ascertain the nature of the soul. While immaterialists have been positive in asserting the existence of a principle, of which, however well-founded the doctrine may be, the mind can form no adequate conception (for perhaps we have no other idea of spirit, than that of matter variously modified), the supporters of the opposite opinion have endeavoured to maintain the more mechanical system of a material existence. The Scriptures, without entering into inquiries, which serve rather to amuse than improve, have taught us in

\* John, xi. 25.



such general terms as may appear to leave room for partial interpretation, certain important and positive assertions. We are in them informed that the dead shall be raised again, that we shall be changed. *Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality* \*.

When the splendid and awful scenes of futurity are opened to the imagination, in the metaphorical language of Scripture, which is the only mode of enlivening the dull conceptions of sense; when the glories of an immortal and incorruptible state are revealed to the view, how do the perishable objects of the present lessen in their value? When we hear of rest, which is eternal, do not the labours and the pains of life shrink in the animating comparison? When we hear of pleasures, which are immortal, what are all the transient joys of a transient life? When we hear of tranquillity, which the wicked cannot trouble, or of peace, which no foes can disturb; when we are told of scenes where no tears

\* 1 Cor. xv. 51—53.

are shed, and where no sighs are heard, do not the afflicted children of this world burn with impatience to be at rest? When we are told of seeing God himself face to face, of contemplating the Author of perfection and the Parent of love, of dwelling in the presence of infinite goodness, and of being supported through endless ages in excessive rapture and in unfading bliss, what is there that the world can bestow, which can claim one moment of our attention? When we hear of heaven resounding with the triumphant acclamations of ten thousand times ten thousand saints and angels, with one voice, with one soul praising their great Creator and Father; when we behold all the scene of glory bursting on the view, splendid, immortal, and rapturous; are we not raised above all the little objects of temporal pursuit? are we not raised above all the idle fears of dissolution? And can we refrain from indulging in the triumphant exclamations of the Apostle, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory* \*?

But though the Christian religion gives us a more certain assurance of a future life than men could ever have obtained by the light of nature; though the eyes of faith may look back on the

\* 1 Cor. xv. 55.



demonstrative proof of its promises in the resurrection of Him who brought life and immortality to light ; yet from the natural desire of prolonging our present existence, from an habitual attachment to the objects about us, and to temporal enjoyments, the mind still views the approach of death with horror, and even in the very moment that it begins its ascent to heaven, looks back with reluctance on the earth. For all our virtuous attachments, it is no less pardonable than natural to retain some fondness ; and where the terrors of a wounded conscience assail us, the clouds and darkness which rest on the grave are most tremendous. There are some instinctive apprehensions of death which fear ever suggests ; and these are firmly strengthened by an attachment to the pleasures of the world. When the train of events in life is successful, and the mind at ease, we must view death with unusual apprehension. When calamity approaches, or our own passions involve us in misfortune, we are too ready to call impatiently on death for relief ; but as we return to tranquillity, and the cloud of evil dissipates, these idle wishes soon vanish : We search the world again for new prospects, and return to the indulgence of appetite, and to the

busy schemes of present advantage, with new alacrity and with new hope.

The attainment of those acquisitions, which the world esteems, or of those which are really valuable, makes death more terrible. To a man who enjoys uninterrupted health, finds his circumstances improve, is eminent in station, is surrounded with the pomp, and courted by all the pleasures of life, the expectation of dissolution is most bitter ; for often it is not the fear of dying, but the thought of parting with all that we love, which gives us pain. The pleasures of life fix down the mind in invisible chains, and prevent it from ascending into futurity. Till the world recedes from our view, and time has stolen from us all that we admire ; till all the prospects of hope fade, who can look with calmness on the event which is to rob him of all that he values, and tear him from all that he loves ?

These reflections will naturally suggest to us the premature fate of him, whose departure from life has given occasion to this meeting. He has been divided from all that he loved, at a time when the usual period of man's appointed days on the earth might encourage the expectation of many future years of enjoyment, even when  
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furrounded by all which can make life desirable ; in the highest rank, and possessed of the means of giving variety to enjoyment, and of renovating pleasure ; and we have to lament the stroke which has separated him from the world, and involved the most elevated personages in this kingdom in affliction.

Posthumous praise is too often the language of servile flattery. To the dead it must be unavailing, if they can hear it ; to the living it can seldom be of use ; for example must be present to strike with force. Virtue is sustained and encouraged by mutual emulation between the good. All that is past is but a dream, as all that is future in this transient state shall shortly be. The most amiable and exemplary qualities are those which are displayed in a small circle, and more often court the shade of retirement, than advance into the busy scenes of life. The opportunities which call forth great abilities or eminent virtues to notice, are comparatively few. Private worth is always active, though in a confined space, and can only be felt by those who are immediately within its reach. When great actions have room to display themselves, they shine with an extensive lustre, and, like the sun, light a world. Private virtue is more quiescent,  
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and, like the flower, is highly fragrant, though confined to a narrow spot. Yet much of the happiness of life depends on the more tranquil and domestic virtues. Splendid actions can only be seen when favourable occasions disclose them; but private worth is always useful, and always affords delight; for the small stream is valuable which never fails. When extraordinary occasions offer, eminent qualities break forth, as the evening brilliance after a clouded day. They rise suddenly, to protect or bless the world, like the spontaneous plant which afforded shade and refreshment to the weary prophet. The social and engaging qualities, which conciliate affection and improve friendship, are most valuable, because always useful. These were eminently possessed by him for whom we now lament; and the loss of them will be sincerely felt by those royal personages with whom he was nearly connected.

Death has here dissolved the most tender ties of consanguinity, and injured those, whose affection was most exemplary and unbounded. Conjugal love too will have to lament the painful separation; and that affection will feel the deepest wound, which the most meritorious life of assiduity, and of amiable tenderness, was employed



ployed to display, and which has merited a much longer continuance of enjoyment. But though neither virtue nor wisdom are exempt from calamity, they have those sources of consolation which only the good can truly experience, and which wisdom best knows how to apply.

Though truth disdains all the dissingenuous arts of flattery, gratitude must not forget those acts which have benefited, and may still benefit, the world. Of every work of charity the good will delight to hear, and such the benevolent will be anxious to imitate.

But of private bounties the praise is transient. Men have ever been more struck with the recital of actions which dazzle with excessive splendour, though they may have been inimical to the happiness of the world; and, extraordinary as it may appear, have paid more court to their oppressors than to their benefactors. They have ever joined in the shouts of victory which subjugates, and bowed to the tyranny which oppresses. They love to bask in the rays of a tropical sun, which scorches as it shines; and pay more servile admiration to him who gains kingdoms by the destruction of thousands, than just applause to him who contributes to the enlargement of social happiness. Such is the folly

and the vanity of life ! But to the dying, the recollection of one sincere, though unavailing sigh ; of one compassionate, though fruitless tear, for human wretchedness, must give more delight than the remembrance of all the pride of life, or the pomp of triumph.

Let us now, by the way of conclusion, turn our thoughts to such meditations, as may profit and convert this occasion to our instruction.

The visitation of death, which is at all times awful, is more affecting in proportion to the rank and dignity of him who falls before it. The ruin of human greatness affects the mind with unusual solemnity. All temporal things derive their importance from the estimation in which they are held. The dissolution of the meanest might teach us the most instructive lesson ; but it is enforced with a deeper impression, when those fall who are elevated. The annihilation of temporal grandeur shows us at once the vanity of life, and the frailty of all our present hopes. We see what reflection may, but seldom does teach us, that power and pre-eminence are but as the fleeting shadows of a vision ; and we awake from the dream of vanity, to a knowledge of the insufficiency of that happiness which is not durable.

Reflection



Reflection and appetite maintain a perpetual struggle. The world offers its delusive pleasures in a thousand tempting forms. The mind is continually recalled from its aspirations for futurity into the regions of sense. To the world we cannot live in total indifference; nor did the Author of our being design that we should. The great art, and the best wisdom, is to acquire a rational and fixed conviction of the instability and transient value of human things, and so to live, that we may be always prepared to die.

Sensuality draws an inconsiderate conclusion from the shortness of life, and foolishly invites us to forget that which cannot be forgotten, to exclude all care for the future, and to indulge only the present. It cries, *Come, let no flower of the spring pass by us, let us crown ourselves with rose-buds before they be withered* \*. But the oracles of God teach us a more profitable lesson, and exhort us so to use things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal. It would be highly conducive to our moral improvement always to keep death in view, and in every scene, in every act, and in every indulgence, to ask ourselves how far they can afford consolation on a death-bed. *For this is the end of man, whose*

\* Wisdom, ii. 8.

*days are as the flower of the field ; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone \*.*

Of the instability of human greatness, we have now a melancholy example ; and those who mourn from custom, would be wise, with the dress of woe, to assume a dignity of thought. But, alas ! of our transient state we want not proofs : Every day, repeats them, and every place of burial shows us the various dates of premature or more advanced dissolution. Whenever we visit those solemn and instructive receptacles of mortality, we may read the wretched history of human affairs. We may hear of the separation of love, of conjugal, of filial, or parental affection. We may read of multitudes cut down in the bloom of youth ; of multitudes snatched away by the hand of time, in the strength of manhood ; but of few who live long and see good days. How soon this may be the fate of him who speaks, or of those who now hear, is only known to that great Creator who gave us being, and can alone recall it. But soon or late we must part with the endearments of friendship, or the softness of love. Soon, perhaps, shall all that now warms the heart, be cold ; and all that now delights the eye, cease

\* Psalm ciii. 16.



to charm. *Soon perhaps shall the silver cord be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken; soon shall the keepers of the house tremble, and all the daughters of music be brought low* \*.

Let us then keep this important consideration always in view, and remember that here we are only *pilgrims and strangers*. *O may I then die the death of the righteous* †! I can conceive each of you say. Let it however be remembered, that he only can die the death of the righteous, who leads a life of piety and of virtue.

*It is appointed unto man once to die* ‡, says the most venerable of books. But the same great authority teaches us, that this solemn event is the commencement of a better life; that *this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality; and that death shall be swallowed up in victory*.

Let faith then hear the animating assurance, and look forward to the day of the Lord, when the graves shall burst, and the dead arise. Then shall we be reunited to our once beloved friends, and again restored to the enjoyment of inseparable affection. Then shall the most glorious scene succeed, and the Saviour of the world again appear; not pierced with wounds, or crowned

\* Eccl. xii. † Numb. xxiii. 10. ‡ Heb. ix. 27.

with thorns ; not as once expiring on the cross, and subdued in the agonies of death, but triumphant over the powers of darkness, and calling his own to the participation of a glorious victory, and of those joys which are ever at the right hand of God ; who shall take us to himself, heal all our transitory sorrows with immortal rapture, and repay the bitterness of death with endless life.



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S E R M O N   X.

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*THE GOOD SAMARITAN.*

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X I O M O N X

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THE GOOD LITERATURE

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## SERMON X.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE, x. Part of the 37th Verse.

Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

**T**HE parable to which the text relates is highly instructive, as it recommends, in the strongest terms, the practice of those virtues which the Christian religion earnestly and constantly inculcates; and in which it is so superior to all the systems of morality, which have obtained the applause of mankind: To consider it therefore with some attention, may be no unprofitable employment.

Our blessed Lord was questioned by a certain lawyer, of the means by which he might gain eternal life; but his inquiries proceeded rather from a speculative, than from a practical motive, rather from an insidious, than a docile disposition. They were made *tempting him* \*. As it

\* Luke, x. 25.

was the profession of the lawyer to expound the Scriptures, or rather to reconcile their literal sense with the Jewish interpretations, and the glosses of the Talmud; as his employment naturally led his mind into subtle disquisitions, and the prejudices of his faith induced him to look with no favourable eye on the doctrines of Jesus Christ, as he probably wished to perplex, rather than to receive instruction, much caution was requisite on the side of our great Master. We accordingly find him speaking with a dignity which at once astonishes, and with a clearness of elucidation, which, whilst it repels the art of his opponent, silences by its power, and charms by the beauty and interest of the exemplification. It is impossible to read without admiration, and to admire without conviction.

Our Lord began by questioning him of the duties commanded by the Mosaic dispensation. *What is written in the law? How readest thou\*?* His answer was ready: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself†.* These are the great principles from which all the motives to religion and morality arise. He who loves God, will obey him; and he who loves his

\* Luke, x. 26. † Ver. 27.



neighbour as himself, cannot be negligent in the practice of moral, kind, and social offices. It is however evident that our Lord was conscious of the imperfection of his opponent, and made such an appeal to the conscience of the inquirer, as must either inform or confute him. The lawyer was immediately struck by self-conviction. He had employed that subterfuge, by which mankind is every day deceived, of admitting the necessity of virtue, and finding some excuse for the neglect of it; of talking of their duty, whilst they delay the performance, and deceive themselves into a belief that they are not deficient. *And he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour \*?* This question produced a most interesting and instructive relation.

*A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side †. Though this man was devoted immediately to the service of God, and though true religion should have taught him that the most acceptable*

\* Luke, x. 29.

† Ver. 31---35.

offering to the Deity was beneficence ; though in his own Scriptures he must have read, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice* \* : Yet we find him moved by no sentiments of pity, but carelessly and indifferently passing by on the other side, ashamed, we may suppose, of his inhumanity, for few men can do an unkind action without some secret blushes ; or perhaps inflated by professional pride, a vice which, unhappily, from the frailty of human nature, infects even those whose duty it is to set lessons of humility, and which is too often the attendant on dignified success. Exact in the formalities, but negligent in the more essential duties of religion, he would not condescend to examine into the circumstances of the distressed object—he therefore is described to pass on : He would not even make inquiries ; and, from a natural want of feeling, or from the intoxication of prosperity, was insensible to calamity. Our blessed Lord seems here to make a nice distinction, both of circumstance and character. If we consider the nature of the Jewish religion, loaded with a multitude of ceremonies, we may easily conceive that many professors of that faith were content to rest their hopes of acceptance with God in the

\* att. ix. 13.



exact performance of stated duties. Nor is this effect confined to them only; for in all religious persuasions, doctrines or ceremonies too often supply the place of moral practice. It is easier to attend, for instance, the regular worship of God, than to govern our passions; it is a cheaper sacrifice to offer up prayers, than to offer alms: The one is only laborious; the other is a violation of selfish principles: Or, if there should be some restraint in attending the house of God; if there should be some painful exertion to indolence, or some surrender of pleasure in that, or any other office of religion, it is at least consolatory to fancy that, by such acquiescence, we atone for occasional licence in some favourite vice; and by this daily practice of mankind, the spirit of religion evaporates in disputes about opinion, or is compressed by ceremony. Morality, therefore, always suffers, where form is substituted for practice; and in proportion as men are zealous about the one, they are sometimes less attentive to the other. They thus lose universal good-will; for intemperate zeal always kills charity. If to these general principles, and the peculiar nature of the Jewish religion, we add one circumstance, we can more easily account for the character before us. By

the Levitical law, no man could be admitted to the order of the priesthood, who had any natural blemish or defect: The election therefore supposed a circumstance favourable to the pride and vanity of mankind. This priest too was probably a Pharisee; one of those who possessed spiritual pride in an eminent degree.

*And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side* \*. This man was of an inferior order of the priesthood, and being of a tribe purposely destined for the service of the altar, was naturally raised into some self-importance. I have supposed the insensibility of these two characters to have arisen, in a great measure, from pride; because that quality has a natural tendency to render us indifferent to the sufferings, or general state, of our fellow-creatures: And the peculiar situation of these men, together with the bigotry of their religious notions, rendered them incapable of liberal sentiments, and stifled the natural suggestions of pity. There is one circumstance attending the behaviour of the Levite, different from that of the priest. The latter is totally insensible to the fate of the man; is described as not at all attending to the object

\* Luke, x. 32.

which



which he met. He saw the wounded man, but seemed not to care whether he was a Jew or Gentile : He perhaps dreaded an inquiry, which might lead to expense ; and feared to listen to the call of distress : Too parsimonious to be ready for benefaction, he was determined to act on that prudential motive, by which too many are influenced, of not listening to woe, lest they should be compelled to bestow something for its relief. From covetousness of disposition, or from narrowness of soul, he was altogether incapable of sympathy. The Levite, on the other hand, had some curiosity : He approached the object ; but, having viewed the poor wounded man, he was not touched by the least compassion ; for he immediately passed by on the other side. He approached him perhaps with some interested view ; he expected to find one who might immediately reward his labour, or who might promote his future advantage. He was perhaps one of those servile characters who are ever awake to their own profit, and warm only in a cause where they expect to reap emolument. But when he discovered the wounded man to have been spoiled, and had no reason to expect any consequent benefit to himself for his interference, with deliberate barbarity he left a fellow-

fellow-creature to perish; nor could the distress of the sufferer awaken the least compassion in him. And such characters afford us examples of the fatal effects of the misapplication of religious doctrines, of tempers soured by bigotry, or rendered callous by an habitual neglect of charitable and social offices.

But to these is opposed a very striking contrast. *A certain Samaritan* \*, a man of a nation detested and despised by the Jews, and equally despising them, *as he journeyed* near the same place, saw the oppressed object, and was moved with compassion. He *bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast* †; conveyed him to a place of safety and ease, and gave every instruction for his preservation and care; promising to answer for all the expense which might be incurred on the occasion, and exerting every attention which kindness and feeling could suggest. When these circumstances were related, our Lord applies to the lawyer for the answer to his question: *Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves* ‡? And he said, he could give no other answer, *he that*

\* Luke, x. 33.

† Ver. 34.

‡ Ver. 36.

*showed*



*showed mercy on him \*.* Then said Jesus, *Go and do thou likewise.*

From this parable two inferences more immediately arise; the nature and extent of compassion in general, and that particular branch of charity which relates to the love of mankind. Let us examine each.

Compassion is that feeling which the mind entertains of the miseries of others; and discovers itself either by sympathy or by active relief. Where there is no power of removing pain, compassion can only apply its good wishes, and affliction must be satisfied with condolence; but where there is happily an union of power and inclination, charity is imperfect, unless it adds actual assistance to good-will. Pity alone is light without heat. It is a pleasing, but ineffectual offering; it is a planet splendid to the eye, but communicating no warmth. It may remove the darkness of affliction, but it is only the dawn of mercy. Active charity is the invigorating power which succeeds; which animates, cheers, and wakens into life; which both dispels gloom, and supplies the principle of nutrition. Whoever therefore feels for the distresses of another, and yet neglects to relieve, performs half only

\* Luke, x. 37.

of the office of charity. He is like the seed that springs up in a shallow soil, flourishing for a season, but never ripening to the harvest ; he is like the barren fig-tree, fair to behold, verdant, and inviting, but fruitless to those who approach it.

Compassion is one of those virtues, which, if it is implanted by nature, owes much of its produce to education. Self-interest naturally secludes attention to others. Our own wants point to our own gratification. Religion and moral culture explain to us the feelings, and direct us to attend to the demands of others. Savage life has less of tenderness, because it is only occupied in relieving its own inconveniences. Society enforces on men the necessity of yielding to the public. It softens the ruggedness of nature ; it inspires, it expands, and it ripens our sensibility. The precepts of the Gospel strengthen all the bonds of the community, and give even greater force, while they admit of greater enlargement. And as so much more cultivation is requisite for the improvement of Christian charity, the precepts of that religion are very numerous which recommend it ; and we must subdue all of the passions which self-interest creates, before we can attain any degree of perfection.

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Compassion must be prompt, cheerful, and active. God, say the Scriptures, *loveth a cheerful giver* \*. We must therefore perform our duty without hesitation, lest distress should lose any of the bounteous dews of benevolence by delay. Reluctant kindness is ungracious. The manner of bestowing a benefit, enhances or diminishes its value. Cheerfulness gives grace to goodness; but tardy favours often render an obligation useless. The sun shines whilst it invigorates; but the gloom attendant on showers makes them a dreary benefit. He therefore who is uncourteous in charity, both loses the thanks which are his due, and confers kindness without giving pleasure.

Compassion acts variously on various tempers. There is an habit of brutality which cannot feel; a sort of discord to nature, which is not in unison with the rest of mankind; a callousness of heart, increased by the encouragement of morose, or selfish, or vicious affections; which will vibrate at no touches of affliction, and is insensible to all that is gentle, engaging, or interesting. There is again a species of natural stupidity, which, without cruelty, has no appearance of softness; a kind of mental torpor; an apathy, which,

\* 2 Cor. ix. 7.

without ferocity, has no gentleness. So various are the modes and degrees of error, where the seeds of benevolence have never been sown, or their growth cherished! But even in more cultivated habits we may distinguish between the reality and the external marks of sensibility. Some are strongly affected by motives of pity; and, having feelings of a more lively nature, express the quickness of their susceptibility by the most extravagant emotions. Others again, from a natural weakness and irritability of nerve, are moved to sympathy; *weep instantly with those who weep*, and as instantaneously *rejoice with them that rejoice*\*. They have a sigh for every woe, and a tear for every tale. But there are others, whose natural firmness of character renders them incapable of such softness, who are yet influenced by the most generous, the most refined, and the most sincere compassion. Their minds are built on principle, and they can alleviate every sorrow, comprehend all the depth of affliction, and act with a more constant and confirmed energy. The former may be more pleasing to affliction—for sorrow delights in participation; but the latter are not less useful: Nay it is even found that those who appear to feel

\* Rom. xii. 15.



most, will sooner forget. The expression of compassion has by some, in the pride of philosophy, been considered as a degradation of human nature, because it is said to arise from weakness; but it is, at least, an amiable weakness, and, as human nature is not perfect, let us not blush at that susceptibility which has its use in contributing to the consolation of the afflicted. Brutal insensibility is the opposite extreme; a state of mind so odious, so unpleasant to others, and so disgraceful to ourselves, that it forms the worst picture of human nature. Let no man be ashamed of sensations, which in the Scriptures are attributed to the most awful of Beings, the God of nature; and which were so conspicuous in the life of his Son.

Let us now consider the second inference—the love of mankind.

Charity, according to the system of Christianity, acts on a very broad and comprehensive idea. It includes every thing which is related to our nature, and disclaims every thing which tends to disjoin mankind; to separate individuals from the species. It considers the whole of the human race as one great mass, of which each is a connecting part. It is that great power of cohesion which unites all the material world. It is

is like that gravity, or attracting power, by which the single particles of matter coalesce, and which pervades and compacts the whole globe. Charity is in its nature and effects the same. It views mankind as an whole ; as one extensive family. Every man is instructed *to love his neighbour as himself* \*. This reciprocal kindness, which joins two individuals, connects a third ; and thus proceeds from parts to universal comprehension. The spreading affection kindles as it goes, and increases the cheering influence of benevolence.

It has been a question often discussed, Whether the present cultivated state of society is to be attributed to the effects of philosophy, or of Christianity ? That the temper of mankind is more soft ; that it does not generally break forth into such excesses as have marked preceding ages, is undoubted. Even war, the great scourge and pest of society, conducts its horrid purposes with a less barbarous and undistinguishing ferocity. Even this licensed system of depredation on the tranquillity, the lives, and the property of mankind, is conducted by regulated laws. Here even cruelty has some principles of restriction ; and, in a degree at least, murder professes mercy.

\* Luke, x. 27.



To what shall we attribute this, but to the prevalence of Christianity? Philosophy, or the light of nature, had long raised her gentle voice, but could not be heard; she had long uttered the genuine and indignant censures of reason, but was drowned in the tumult of contending passions. What therefore philosophy could not establish, shall we not attribute to the benign influence of the Gospel? Let us compare them with each other.

Philosophy was in its nature mild; so is Christianity: But the virtues of the one are rather of a passive nature; those of the other, active. Philosophy instructed men in the tranquil, or more busy ways of virtue; so does the Christian religion: But their objects are different. Philosophy chiefly confined its views to the present life: Religion has a more exalted and sublime source of action. The former considers virtue principally as conducing to the happiness of temporal life; the latter looks into the whole of existence, and makes man consider himself as calculated to perform all the ends, and improve in all the powers of reason, throughout all the boundless extent of eternity. Philosophy was cold in the propagation of its precepts; while the teachers of Christianity have been inflamed

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with a laudable enthusiasm. The views of philosophy were narrow; confined to sects and opinions; it was inflated with vain distinctions, and with trivial prejudices. The views of Christianity are unconfined; it looks over all moral nature: It makes no geographical limitation of country or climate; it reaches beyond the boundaries of oceans, of mountains, and deserts; boundaries placed by the Almighty Providence to confine and counteract the ambition of mankind, but not to serve as separations of mutual good-will. It makes no difference of colour or government. It knows only the general title of man, and disclaims all more confined considerations. It harmonizes all that is discordant; it connects all that is unsocial; and it awakens all that is engaging. A principle so generous, so grand, so extensive, so universal, and accommodating, cannot but produce a more gradual enlargement of sentiment, and tend to soften the dispositions of mankind. It admits no separation of sect or party; it has no discrimination but that of vice or virtue; and finds in every part of human nature something that is congenial to itself, something to which it is related; and denies the participation of its affections to none.

Let



Let us then look on all men in that light which the Gospel displays. Let us despise the meanness and bigotry of those who estimate others by the classes to which they belong; who condemn in the aggregate, and are ready to persecute all whose creed differs from their own; remembering that every act of violence is an infringement both of the public peace, and of the laws of that religion which says, *Putting away all wrath, and bitterness, and clamour, be ye kindly affectioned one to another* \*. We should not only abstain therefore from outrage, but we should divest ourselves of all prejudices, and be careful how we attribute bad motives to those who may chance to differ from us in religious or in political persuasions. Let us join in constant prayers to the Almighty Disposer of events, that he would be pleased so to order this world, that we may all become of *one mind in Christ Jesus*; that men may nourish virtuous and kind inclinations; that the nations of the earth may cultivate the blessings of peace within their own borders; that the horrors of war may no more desolate the earth; that *every hill may rejoice*, and every *valley laugh and sing* †, richly clothed in their own native productions.

\* Rom. xii. 10.

† Psalm lxxv.

I shall conclude with recommending to you the example of our blessed Lord himself. That he entertained no prejudices of sect or party, is evident. It is remarkable, in the parable before us, that he attributes the most virtuous actions to a Samaritan. The Samaritans and the Jews entertained a mutual hatred for each other. This was founded on a religious dispute; and to such excesses did it proceed, that they exchanged no civilities, or common offices of life. The Samaritans had separated from the Jewish worship: But did our Lord conceive any narrow or uncharitable disgust? Did he look with anger on men, because they did not entertain the opinions of the church in which he worshipped? On the contrary, in relating this very parable he shows that the Samaritan only was influenced by the true spirit of religion, and was worthy of imitation. When he cured ten lepers, we find the Samaritan alone thankful; and him he received as a true disciple. Of the woman of Samaria he asked to drink, and when she expressed her surprise, told her that those only were *the true worshippers of God, who worshipped him in spirit and in truth* \*. He withstood all the violence of popular fury; and never disdained any that ap-

\* John, iv. 24.



proached him, though the bigotted multitude called him *the friend of publicans and sinners*. Look then to this great example; study his practice, and wheresoever ye find any excellence, *Go ye and do likewise*.

proceeds into the highest mountains  
called him the friendly Indian and hunter.  
I look then to this great example; that his  
justice and whatever we had any ex-  
ample, could not be his only example.

And I look to this great example; that his  
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## SERMON XI.

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### ON GRATITUDE.

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S E R M O N X I

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ON GRATITUDE.

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## S E R M O N XI.

ON GRATITUDE.

LUKE, xvii. 17, 18.

And Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed?  
 But where are the nine? There are not found that re-  
 turned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

**T**HIS portion of Scripture relates to a mi-  
 racle performed by our blessed Lord, who,  
 as he went to Jerusalem, was passing through a  
 village, and was met by ten men, who were af-  
 flicted with the disease of leprosy. *And they*  
*lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master,*  
*have mercy on us\*.* *And when he saw them, he*  
*said unto them, Go, show yourselves unto the*  
*priests†;* a command intended as a more public  
 demonstration of the cure he proposed to make.  
*And it came to pass, that as they went they were*  
*cleansed.* One of them, a Samaritan—by which  
 distinction the Evangelist meant to insinuate,

\* Ver. 13.

† Ver. 14.

perhaps,

perhaps, that the rest were of the Jewish nation—this one only, when he saw that *he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at the feet of Jesus, giving him thanks* \*.

At this single instance of gratitude, our Lord exclaims, *Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole* †: That is, though the other persons have received a cure of their bodily infirmities, they have not made the obvious use of the goodness of God; they have neither expressed any acknowledgments, nor have been properly influenced by the mercies they have experienced. They have neglected to return affection to the Author of good; to adore, and to serve him. They have remained insensible to the effects which my power should have produced; they have continued in the same negligent and sinful state as before; but thy mind is more susceptible of natural emotions: You apply to God, and by God you shall be accepted; your faith will work a more powerful and important cure. As you are conscious of the

\* Ver. 15, 16.

† Ver. 19.



mercy of God, you will offer him the sacrifice he requires, and you may be confident of his favour; you have discovered the path of salvation, and it shall not be denied you. *Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.* Whole indeed were the nine, inasmuch as their leprosy was removed; but they were far from that state of salvation, from that more essential cure, which is to be obtained by a renunciation of sin, by a sincere repentance, and by the immediate devotion of the heart to God.

In this man we have a remarkable instance of gratitude; and I shall take occasion, from hence, to consider that affection of the mind at more length, since it is of the highest importance, the source of great excellence, and conduces considerably to the increase of piety and morality. I shall therefore view it both in a religious and moral sense; as it relates to God, or as it affects our social duties.

It will be first proper to form a just conception of the nature and extent of the duty.

Gratitude is that sense of obligation which the mind entertains for benefits received; which returns affection and reciprocal kindness. It must first be sensible, next affectionate, and then active. Without owning obligation, it cannot exist;

exist; without love it is cold; and without the repayment of kindness, it is imperfect. Each of these three qualifications is requisite; but they are not all equally so. Gratitude may be very ardent, but of that others cannot judge, until it is called into action; for to be proved, it must work. It is not sufficient that the principle of warmth exists. It must be set in motion, and must kindle, that it may shine. However grateful the mind may be, its sensations are solitary, if they are not displayed by external proofs. Gratitude thus silently operating, is a flower in the bud, waiting for want of genial suns to ripen its lustre; it is a fragrance lost for the want of expansion. It may be sincere, but it cannot be known. It is all lustre beneath the horizon, or concealed in clouds; but not perceived by men. It is a jewel in the mine; *it is the candle put under a bushel* \*, communicating no brightness. Gratitude, in its effects and operation, is similar to love, but in its nature different. Love exists, where benefits can neither be expected nor bestowed. Gratitude owes its very existence to favours received. Love diffuses rays, as from a body self-luminous; gratitude reflects only the light which it receives. Love bestows favours

\* Mark, v. 15.

purely



purely for the sake of benefit to its object ; gratitude, merely in return. Love is the parent of gratitude ; it creates and directs its motions. Affection produces kindness ; but gratitude may be taught to act even without affection. We feel ourselves obliged ; a sense of rectitude disposes us to repay obligation ; but it may happen that we feel no peculiar propensity towards our benefactor, since time and intercourse are required to produce sentiments of friendship or tenderness. It may perhaps happen that we receive benefits from persons who, in their general conduct, are even worse than unengaging ; yet to those we equally owe the duty of thankfulness.

The best principle of gratitude, is certainly love ; and it is the most sure : But there is a substitute, which may be equivalent with a good mind ; and that is, a sense of duty. We know it to be right to return an act of kindness ; and therefore from principle we do so. It is true that we ought to love those who are ready to favour and do good to us ; and it argues no small degree of insensibility, where the mind cannot be brought to do so. But it must be remembered, that our affections are not our own ; that our partialities are often influenced in a manner for which we generally cannot account ;

and that if we resolve to act on a sincere motive, to be as ready in restoration as we can, to guard against negligence, and to press all the good dispositions in our power towards a benefactor, we do all which the imperfection of human nature will permit. Let not this, however, be any encouragement to insensibility: For though at first we may not feel all that we ought, repeated bounties should produce ardent affection; and to be often obliged, without loving the friend, implies a most odious obduracy.

Duty, though less lively than voluntary feelings, will, to a good mind, be a very powerful incitement. In a word, strictly speaking, all gratitude is a virtue self-taught. It is not spontaneous: It is a re-acting power. Love, by obliging, delights itself; gratitude, while it is merely such, discharges an obligation with some degree of pain. It is the payment of a debt. It yields possibly some convenience; it encounters some difficulty; or it works with some labour. It is often a violation of self-interest. It may interfere with our own pleasures, our own pursuits, or our own expectations. From these two evils it is, therefore, that men are so often ungrateful: First, because this self-love hardens the heart, and next, because they have not sufficiently



ficiently taught themselves to estimate the nature and extent of gratitude.

Let us now consider how we ought to be influenced by this virtue, with respect to God.

First, we should constantly recall to our minds what we owe to him for all that he confers on us. And this should not be the occupation of a few careless or idle hours, but the first business of life. It should at once be the cause and the object of all pursuits. This should teach us to love God; for to this St. John applies as the source of human affection. *We love God, because he first loved us* \*, says that Evangelist. This idea we ought to cherish, and return, to the utmost of our power, what we receive. We should first endeavour to acquire a love of God, and study to express our sincerest affection, by all the means which nature and grace afford us.

To attain this, let us reflect on the innumerable blessings bestowed on us; not merely those common benefits, the sun and air, which alike shine on, and alike cherish, both the good and bad; not merely those wonders of creation, which, great as they are, are common to all; not merely those delightful productions of a wise Providence, which are apparent in all nature;

\* John, iv. 19.

which

which excite admiration from the meanest capacity, and at once delight and exercise the understanding of the most philosophic ; but we must at the same time look at nature, and into ourselves. We must compare external with internal, universal with particular dispensations ; and learn thankfulness to God, not only for what he does for all, but for what he does for each of us. The air, the sea, the heavens and the earth, are full of the riches of God ; his wonders and his love astonish us in the most sublime, and invite us in the less striking efforts of his power ; from the vast orb that produces vegetation, to the meanest blade of grass which grows under its influence. Yet this is not all : Each of us has, perhaps, more peculiar reason for homage to God, which may be encouraged without spiritual pride. It is only presumption to think too highly of ourselves, in comparison of others. It is piety, it is gratitude, to think highly when it is due, for the great end of life, glory to God.

To acquire this proper sense of what we owe to the Divine Being, we must correct every querulous disposition of mind ; every sanguine indulgence of fantastic hopes ; every painful retrospect ; and every unpleasant comparison, which may promote discontent. We must not  
look



look with inflamed desires to possessions and attainments, which are out of our reach ; we must not repine for enjoyments possessed by our superiors ; but estimate ourselves constantly with those who tread in the vale of life, or sit under the shadows of affliction. Every one may discover, if the mind is capable of good affections, reason to be thankful, that *he is not as other men are* \*. The meanest may perceive some equally mean ; the afflicted may see some equally disconsolate ; and the poorest many less happy. Every man may discover in himself some cause for exultation. If he is not rich, he may have health ; if he is not great, he may enjoy tranquillity of mind ; to which greatness is commonly a stranger. Almost every person has something, which, by comparison, may give him an advantage over another ; every man has something to balance evil ; something for which he may rejoice ; something which he would not wish to lose. Many however have the strongest reasons for thankfulness ; many eat the bread of abundance, and want for no indulgence which life can afford. All must remember several blessings unexpectedly conferred, and even un- hoped for ; many dangers escaped ; many evils

\* Luke, xviii. 11.

avoided; and the mind must be callous, which is not awakened to ardent affections whenever it indulges such interesting reflections.

But if a man is not rich in treasures on earth, let him look forward to treasures in heaven. If he is not surrounded by worldly enjoyments, let him learn to raise his contemplations above; let him look from earth to heaven, from sense to mind, from the world to God; and leave the perishable causes of anxiety and misery far behind him. Here every mind may make its own happiness; here every mind may find a source of expectation and joy. Here affliction may find consolation of the most lenient nature; and the poor, the *rejected of men* \*, and who dare not hope, must acquiesce with the dispensations of the Almighty. Those who endure extreme calamity cannot murmur, when others experience misfortunes still more severe; the voice of complaint must be silenced by the example of greater wretchedness. He must undoubtedly acknowledge his advantages, who observes others sunk much deeper in distress. Here clamour must be confounded, darkness must be cheered, and humility elated. The discontented must be confuted, the good must be

\* Isaiah, liii. 3.

thankful:



thankful : Here shall *the lame leap as the hart with joyfulness ; and here shall the tongue of the dumb sing with thankfulness* \*.

Let us thus reflect on the dispensations of God ; on all the bounties of creation, of preservation, and, above all, of redemption. Let us look to the blessings bestowed on us in the revelation of the divine will, and learn thankfulness to the wise Author of our being, who has sent his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, to teach us the knowledge of salvation ; who has given him for our sakes, *that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him* †.

Having thus acquired an habitual sense of gratitude to God, let us inquire how it should be expressed.

*This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments* ‡. He therefore who would be grateful, must make the law of God his sole delight. He must think it his first and whole business to express his sense of the goodness of God, by obedience ; for obedience is the first principle both of love and gratitude. He must next learn to love men ; because *this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his bro-*

\* Isaiah, xxxv. 6. † 1 Thess. v. 10. ‡ John, v. 3.

*ther also* \*, said the venerable Evangelist, in his affectionate exhortation. Cherish therefore all social affections; banish all weak prejudices; learn to love men, however they may differ from you in sentiments of religion, or be divided by politics. Never detest or despise others, because they may be of different sects, and dissent from your own opinions; for he who hates another, because he is of a contrary persuasion, is not influenced by a true love of God, and is guilty of great error; for in cases where all may, in some respects, be wrong, every one may be allowed to judge for himself: He therefore is negligent of his duty to God, who is inflamed by any temporary madness of party in religion or politics. Allow for the frailties and weaknesses of the world, and consider the whole race of your fellow-creatures as the children of the Almighty, and all the professors of the Gospel as *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ* †. Let the day begin with thankfulness, with prayer, and praise. With such solemn acts let it always end; but let the intermediate space be occupied in the duties of life; in securing your own salvation, and in the promotion of the welfare of mankind. This is the true expression of gratitude to God; and

\* John, iv. 21.

† Rom. viii. 17.



in this you give glory to him, and pursue, at the same time, the dearest interests which self-love can dictate.

Let us now consider how gratitude is to operate towards men. Whatever has been said of this virtue with respect to the Supreme Being, will apply to our human intercourse, though in a subordinate degree. For as our prime and greatest obligations are derived from God, he will naturally claim our first attention; and nothing can belong to men, which interferes with interests of an higher nature. Happily, however, things are so constituted, and the divine laws are so framed, that the service of our fellow-creatures is one essential part of the service of God himself. He is even pleased to dispense with some of that observance which is his indisputable right, whenever our assistance is needed by a fellow-creature. Practical virtue, therefore, is secondary piety.

Human gratitude, then, must be ardent, disinterested, constant, sensible, and mindful of obligation. Mankind is generally accused of ingratitude; too often on reasonable grounds. As gratitude has been before asserted to be an acquired, rather than a natural virtue, we ought not to wonder that men should not have learnt

to estimate the value of favours, or to fix those principles in the mind, which are necessary for preserving a lively sense of them. We seldom feel enough for others. It may not be easy to conceive the labour, or to understand the perplexities, those may have incurred, who have conferred a kindness. It is often difficult fully to comprehend the sacrifices which they may have made in obliging; benefits therefore may be bestowed with much inconvenience on the part of a friend, which are received without a nice sense of such sacrifices or inconveniences. But a clear conception of these we should endeavour to acquire, and preserve, with unremitted diligence, from escaping our thoughts; since there is certainly no greater reproach than unthankfulness. As many good qualities of the mind contribute to form gratitude, the absence of it implies the absence of all virtue. If men are mindful of favours in proportion as they are virtuous, they must be vicious in proportion as they are, in this respect, negligent or insensible.

To rescue the world from a very considerable reproach, it may be observed, that the charge of ingratitude is often misapplied. Vanity, self-love, and pride, will frequently over-rate their own efforts. Parsimony magnifies its little bounties,



bounties. Interested persons are blinded by their own passions ; and it is unpardonable to reproach men with neglecting to return kindness, where we never meant any ; where we rather designed to make a bargain, than to bestow a favour. If therefore men are too often found to frame excuses for the neglect of duty, others are ready to estimate their concessions too highly ; and it is not that men are unthankful, but that we are ourselves too interested, too designing, and too ostentatious.

Gratitude must be mindful of its duties ; it must be constant, ardent, and watchful over its own failures. An obligation must never be forgotten. In two instances, where separate claims interfere, we may certainly make our choice, because the will is free ; and to be compelled to love, is a most painful task : But this choice, as far as possible, should be guided by reason, and dictated neither by interest nor caprice. It should be the result of deliberation and justice.

It is an opinion, too commonly embraced, that reproaches are a species of insult, and cancel obligation ; and that a benefactor, who reminds his dependants of what he has done, at once dissolves the ties of duty. This is a maxim of the most fatal and pernicious nature, which can only

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be dictated by the utmost depravity ; which can alone be entertained by those who have no sense of virtue ; and who are lost to every generous feeling. But as it is too generally received, it becomes necessary to oppose it.

The man who descends to reproach, may be forgetful of his own dignity ; he certainly may wound the feelings of delicacy : But there are many occasions on which it may be necessary to recall attention. The best disposition may become, if not forgetful, yet negligent, of what it owes. The novelty which attends the enjoyment of benefits, will cease to affect us. While our wants are importunate, we are ready to promise much ; because, for the time, we believe that we shall be able to pay all that we profess. This is an honest kind of self-deception. In the ardour of immediate possession we are elate, and liberal of words and action ; but the blaze of passion will naturally diminish. The occasion of a kindness having ceased, the incidental feelings will be weakened ; and the embers of recollection will then retain an imperfect warmth. When we first set forth, impelled by strong impressions, we are vigorous and ardent : But it happens in the course of gratitude, as in many other human undertakings, that, like the horse in  
a race,



a race, we grow more and more weary, and, like bodies put violently into motion, we lose velocity by every obstruction, and decrease in energy as we advance.

The best of men will thus perceive their efforts gradually slacken, unless new motives arise, or remembrance, properly cherished, should again rouse them to action: And bad men are earnest to stifle the suggestions of memory. To them it is like the conscience of the guilty. It haunts them in every retirement; it upbraids them in every reflection; and as the former sometimes drives men to despair, the latter turns love into detestation. When depraved minds are conscious of favours unpaid, it is not uncommon for them to turn the odium from themselves to their friends; and, because they cannot bear the stings in their own minds, to avoid them they learn to hate their benefactors.

Whoever ceases to treat a friend with a degree of affection, disproportionate to love bestowed, can have no reason for taking offence at being reminded of his neglect. But on a supposition that a benefactor may, through the heat of passion, through misconception, or sudden impetuosity of temper, forget his own dignity, shall one angry reproach, shall one momentary act, efface the  
the

the remembrance of unlimited kindness ; of favour conferred by perpetual attention ? Shall marks of kindness fleet by, heeded for a moment only, like odours in the passing gale ? Surely such doctrines can be advanced only by those who wish for an occasion to be relieved from a debt, and to remove the weight of an obligation which they never mean to repay. This is to undo substantial virtue, by a base affectation of sentiment.

As gratitude is the highest tribute which affection or friendship can receive, so ingratitude is the most injurious to the present interests and temporal happiness of society. One instance of an ungrateful return poisons the sweetness of life. It interrupts that soft flow of benevolence which waters this vale of disappointment and sorrow. Man hence grows distrustful of man ; love is disturbed by jealousy, intimacy by suspicion, and mutual confidence is destroyed. The liberal hand of charity is closed, and its heart chilled. Generosity learns the narrow and unsocial lessons of parsimony ; and that vital heat of kindness, which should promote the generous circulation of benevolent feelings throughout all the social body, is extinguished, or frozen into apathy. All the beautiful fabric of morality, all  
that



that softens life, all that communicates blessing to it, all that enlivens it; all the harmony, the connexions, the social affections of mankind; all that inspires hope, or forms the innocent illusions of fancy; all exquisite sensibility, and all the motives of good-will, are at once annihilated. The world becomes a desert; we find only the tares of disappointment, where we had expected to reap the fruits of philanthropy.

It may be required to propose some rule for the regulation of our conduct in the discharge of the duty of which we treat; but innate goodness will dictate the measure, and true feeling will operate with the greatest certainty. This however it may be useful to observe, that we ought always to proportion our gratitude to the degree we should ourselves expect; to do here as we would wish to be done by. But in this instance, as in other transactions, we must endeavour to divest ourselves of partiality. Men would seldom err, if self-love did not represent their actions in false colours. It is not from determined wickedness, but through sophistry, that we elude the reproaches of reflexion, and satisfy ourselves with a negligence of what is good, or with a substitute of one quality for another. By specious reasoning we may too easily explain

away every obligation, and shake off every bond of allegiance.

Let us then constantly endeavour to cherish and cultivate grateful affections. To God we owe every thing. Let us not with brutal enjoyment taste his blessings, and forget the Giver. Let us not look on all the glorious effects of his creative power and wisdom with the indifference of the animal tribe, who, amidst plenty and beauty, are unconscious of the Author of all that they receive and participate. Let not the goodness of God be bestowed on us in vain; let a sense of his love produce the fruits of obedience. Let us not neglect the moral cultivation, and the active employment of gratitude. Let us not sit idly down with a conviction of the beneficence of the Creator; but, according to the advice of the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus, *let us bud forth as a rose growing by the brook of the field, and bless the Lord in all his works*\*. Let us daily pour forth our humble and earnest acknowledgments for all the gifts of creation, of preservation, and redemption, and say with the Psalmist, *It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing of thy praises, O thou Most High; to tell of thy love early in the morning, and of thy*

\* Chap. xxxix. 13.



*truth in the night-season* \*. And again, *Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all thine infirmities; who saveth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness* †. Or again, in the language of the Apostle, *Let us be giving thanks always, for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

With respect to man, unthankfulness is one of the deepest wounds we can inflict; and that virtue must be of the greatest importance, without which no character in life can be sustained. Gratitude is the support of friendship, of love, of every tender connexion of society; whilst ingratitude daily sends numbers to a premature grave, by that worst species of sickness, a broken heart. It produces the most painful disappointment; because it nips the fruit of those benevolent dispositions, in which man can alone be the image of God. The exercise of social virtues, is the highest state of human felicity. Unthankful men embitter these exquisite pleasures, and disturb this celestial frame of mind. He who is mistaken where he has placed confidence, is often secluded from every hope; for if one fair sem-

\* Ps. xcii.

† Ps. ciii.

blance proves false, may not all be the same? The soul, thus sickened, retires into itself the prey of gloomy despair, without one endearing comfort to cherish it. Others too are injured by the misconduct of every single treacherous character; for the stream of good-will is thus checked in its flow, and frozen into selfishness. Let us then cultivate a principle which conduces so much to our own happiness, and to that of the world; remembering, that as a grateful mind is always a good one, so he is the most worthless of human beings who is unthankful to God, and unmindful of the kindness of men.



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S E R M O N   X I I .

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*PROGRESS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.*

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## S E R M O N XII.

ON THE PROGRESS OF THE CHRISTIAN  
RELIGION.

[Preached on the first Sunday after opening the New Chapel, Stonehouse,  
Devon, December 27, 1789.]

ACTS, xii. 24.

—The word of God grew and multiplied.

HAVING had occasion to address you on laying the foundation of this chapel, I then considered some of the general principles of the Christian religion. It is now my design to offer a few observations on its advancement in society. This, it is to be presumed, will be a proper subject for my first address after the completion of this edifice, which must give the friends of religion great pleasure, from the opportunities it affords them of uniting in the service of their Creator, and worshipping him *in the beauty of holiness* \*.

The progress of Christianity has been considered as an internal evidence of its divine ori-

\* 2 Chron. xx. 21.

gin. But this argument must be admitted with some limitation. That any religion should acquire an extensive influence over the minds of a large part of mankind, is not to be considered as an infallible test of its intrinsic excellence. The empire of Polytheism prevailed, both in extent and duration, to a degree infinitely more considerable than that of Christianity. The doctrines of Mahomet can boast of a number of votaries, to which the religion of Jesus can claim no equality. The reception of error is commonly more general than that of truth. Where it has gained a foundation, it is supported by the prejudices of mankind; by passions which are powerful; by opinions inveterate and rooted; and by habits to which they are enslaved, and of which they are tenacious. The voice of reason cannot be heard in the tumult, occasioned by violent and various argument, and by heated imaginations. Its progress must therefore be slow, and its effect gradual. Truth must triumph by repeated conflicts; successive obstacles must be surmounted; its station maintained at every advantage, and a victory gained by small approaches. It is therefore not by the success of doctrines alone that we are to determine their merits. We must apply to the causes of their progress



progress as the criterion by which we are to judge; and if these are found inadequate, we may safely conclude that the advancement of the religion has been attained by the native force of truth; by its own internal excellence; or by the preternatural assistance of that Power which cannot be resisted.

In such a comparative view the Christian religion claims our most serious attention, and strikes with a free conviction, which is irresistible. In examining the causes of its propagation, we meet with circumstances most unfavourable to such an event. Those objects, which are generally inviting to the senses, or interesting to the passions of mankind, are not proposed in this system to animate hope, or to excite desire. The great end of the Christian faith is to withdraw the affections of men from all which flatters present appetite, or satisfies immediate gratification, wherever these interfere with its more important objects; wherever these are inimical to interests of a more abstracted nature; and wherever the business or enjoyments of temporal life are dangerous to the happiness of the immortal soul. In the Christian scheme the scenes of sublunary grandeur vanish, and become as a dream. The exuberance of pride, the madness of ambition,

the raptures of sensuality, the rapacity of avarice, and the excess of all irregular indulgence, are considered as incompatible with those sublime objects which it proposes; and thus every inordinate pursuit is so inconsistent with the life which the precepts of Jesus Christ recommend, that the lovers of pleasure will all naturally turn from invitations in which they can expect no gratification; from which they can derive no immediate advantage, and of which the rewards are remote and indistinct.

That this was actually the case, experience has proved. When our blessed Master made his appearance on earth, he found at first no followers in those who were engaged in the delights of sense, or plans of temporal interest. He chose his disciples from the habitations of poverty, from poor fishermen, and illiterate mechanics. The busy multitude, the votaries of pleasure, the gay and the luxurious, as the Prophet had foretold, *saw in him no beauty, or form of comeliness, that they should desire him* \*. They turned from his invitations with contempt; they beheld him with aversion, and therefore would not attend to his lessons. For what had he to engage men, whose affections were absorbed by sublunary

\* Isaiah, liii. 2.



objects? Yet this divine Messenger had been expected for ages, and had formed the subject of the most sublime prophecies. His kingdom had been predicted in the most exalted style; and the truth of those predictions attested by the death and sufferings of venerable Prophets. The superintending agency of Providence had been engaged in producing a series of splendid scenes, preparatory to this great event. The fate of empires had been involved in the transaction, and the revolution of ages occupied in the completion of it.

The Jews indeed were disgusted at the humble appearance of their King and Saviour. From religious rites, in their nature supercilious and unconciliating, yet so contrived in the wisdom of an almighty Providence, they had conceived the erroneous presumption that they alone were selected as the favourites of Heaven, that they alone possessed an exclusive privilege of grace; they were therefore jealous of such prerogatives, and unwilling that the rest of mankind should share the bounties of Providence. To men contracted in their sentiments by such prejudices, and inflamed by spiritual pride, he could not be an acceptable preacher, who should offer the communication of such exalted privileges to per-

sons with whom they judged it pollution to connect themselves by any social ties, or even to partake of their daily food, and whose religious opinions they beheld with a pious aversion. From a series of temporal distress and national calamities, they naturally conceived the idea of restoration to temporal grandeur. Absorbed in such gross wishes, and panting for national freedom, they were not satisfied with the distant hope of future and speculative rewards. They wished to shine in the annals of nations, and therefore insulted that Prince, who assured them *that his kingdom was not of this world* \*.

If these were impediments to the reception of the Gospel among the Jews, there were others equally strong with the Gentiles. Their minds were corrupted by the dark conceptions of Polytheism. The chaste ideas, which are annexed to the acknowledgment of one Supreme Being, of the most immaculate holiness and most unerring perfection, must have met many difficulties in the minds of those who worshipped a variety of powers, neither perfect nor pure. The vulgar and immoral rites by which they were approached, whilst they debased the practice, debauched also the minds, of the worshippers.

\* John, xviii. 36.



The necessity of those virtues, and of that purity which is recommended in the Gospel, they could not comprehend; and what they could not comprehend, how should they believe or embrace?

Our blessed Saviour, indeed, produced incontestable proofs of his divine mission. He cured diseases which were beyond the power, and therefore were considered as no objects of human skill; he restored the use of corporeal faculties when they had been long lost, and created them when they had never existed. He gave speech to the dumb, and restored the dead to life. But even of these benevolent and disinterested proofs of a divine interposition, while some believed, malice was prepared to take advantage; for the facts, which infidelity could not deny, it ascribed to the powers of darkness. *He casteth out devils by the power of Beelzebub\**, said they; and with these very acts of benevolence they insulted him in his humiliation; when in the agonies of death they saw him fainting on the cross, exclaiming, *He saved others, himself he cannot save* †.

To those, who are now firmly established in the principles of the Christian faith, who have

\* Matt. xii. 24.

† Mark, xv. 31.

received it by prescription, and in whose tenour of life, and modes of thinking, its doctrines are inseparable, it may appear a cause of wonder that, with such amiable and engaging testimonies, so venerable a Teacher should be rejected. But were the experiment again to be repeated, the event would, in all probability, be exactly similar. A person at all acquainted with the movements of the human mind, and skilled in that science which we call a knowledge of the world, will readily conclude, that a messenger from Heaven would, in our own times, find a like reception. *The children of every generation would esteem themselves wiser than the children of light* \*. His followers would be comparatively few. If he assumed an humble character, pride would turn from his exhortations with disdain, and blush to avow an unpatronized Master. Ambition would despise his inglorious invitations, and feel no energy in paths which lead only to tranquillity and inactive bliss. Envy would undoubtedly attempt to depreciate his excellence; and vanity would laugh at his admonitions. Some would be unwilling to relinquish habits long acquired; some to forego the indulgence of a favourite passion; some the profits of

\* Luke, xvi. 8.



unlawful traffic ; and some would be careless and indifferent about their eternal welfare. Would the haughty man consent to intermix with the humble associates of virtue ? Would the miser consent to divide his property with the community ? or scatter the tedious accumulations of years among the poor ? Should a man be advised to desist from pursuing a scheme of dishonest gain, who had been long engaged in such practices, would he not turn aside with sorrow from the mortifying admonition ? Those who have nothing to risque, and who might therefore reap advantage, would perhaps readily hear. A few of the well-disposed might be willing to relinquish every advantage for the sake of virtue. The followers of truth would, however, be few ; and of those, the ingenuous and the poor would be most conspicuous.

These may be considered as some of the numerous impediments which have obstructed the progress of the Gospel ; some applicable to the first age of the church, others to every succeeding one : Nor can we reconcile its subsequent success, but by admitting the interposition of the Divine Being. From an origin apparently inconsiderable, we may observe it increase, till it attains to great importance, and spreads to a great

great extent. The instruments of its propagation were, as it should seem, inadequate to such an effect. Its Author was despised, and brought to an ignominious death. His first followers were equally wretched, and were to encounter the most hazardous dangers ; to endure insults no less violent ; and to suffer discouragement no less perplexing. With such feeble instruments, however, the Gospel was spread, in the space of one century, to a vast extent ; from the narrow confines of Judea, to the Atlantic Ocean in the West ; through the wild territories and unpolished natives of Germany, and into various other nations. That Christianity had so far increased by the second century, is admitted by those who are unwilling to receive more exaggerated accounts.

Christianity, thus at first unnoticed, imperceptibly acquires, every day, new profelytes : It no sooner obtains the attention, than it wins the admiration, of the world. Its pure doctrines find way into the hearts of men ; and the profane and absurd deities of the Pagan mythology crumble in their temples. In many instances immediate conviction flashes on the mind, and the perspicuity and fulness of truth leave no room for doubt or indifference.

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If imagination should trace the advancement of the Christian religion over the surface of the globe, we may observe large spaces obscured by a mass of darkness; which, as the clouds remove, are gradually emerging from the shade; and again a transient brightness succeeded by a melancholy obscurity: But as the light of truth prevails, the scene is heightened into excessive splendour.

Infidelity has attempted to account for the propagation of the Christian faith by natural causes. Amongst these is enumerated the unanimity of its primitive disciples. Such a concordance and harmony of sentiment is, however, no less miraculous in itself; and this argument only removes the objection from one principle to another.

Obstructions to this progress, of a different nature, were numerous and powerful. Successful persecutions of the unhappy Christians protracted their sufferings, and were inimical to the open profession of their faith. The first general outrage of this kind was perpetrated by the cruel and unrelenting Nero. The despised and oppressed, but patient and harmless, disciples of Jesus, were as rashly as ignorantly confounded, as a sect of the Jews; and because this tyrant  
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was suspected of setting fire to his own capital, he retorted the odium of this wanton barbarity on the miserable Christians. The horrid ingenuity of cruelty was exhausted, and the severest modes of death practised on numbers of venerable and inoffensive martyrs. Some of the Roman emperors were more propitious to the cause of Christianity. Tiberius, with the ignorant zeal of idolatry, would have enrolled the immaculate Jesus in the number of the impure deities of Rome; an attempt which was counteracted by the senate. This however was actually effected by Alexander Severus, who placed the statue of Christ, together with those of Abraham, Orpheus, and Apollonius, in his domestic chapel; but every calm of the primitive church was soon interrupted by a violent tempest.

In the letters of Pliny to the emperor Trajan, we have a beautiful picture of the early purity of the disciples of Christ; a testimony of the highest degree of conviction, because given us by one who had no interest in deception. The Christians had been misrepresented to the emperor. The Roman proconsul was required to examine into the truth of these accusations. He did so, with a coolness highly laudable, and acquitted them with a justice no less remarkable.

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We have, however, to lament the wretched corruption, which too soon polluted this charming simplicity of doctrine and morals. With precepts calculated to exalt the human nature to the highest state of perfection; with every inducement to peace, and the discouragement of selfish views, this amiable religion was, at an early period, wrested to the cause of animosity the most bitter, of persecution the most unrelenting, and of tyranny the most oppressive.

Heresies had indeed crept into the church, even during the lives of the Apostles. But while the followers of Jesus considered an holy and practical life as the great essential in the character of the Christian, the ages of the church are marked with internal tranquillity and purity. But when they began to depart from this rational system, when opinion supplied occasion for religious disputes, we unhappily trace the Gospel of the meek Jesus through violent factions, through scenes of blood and persecution. In the fifth century the patriarchs of Rome and Constantinople begin to inflame the minds of men, by their jealous claims of superiority. A spirit of outrage and fury then goes forth. The meek precepts of the Gospel are heard no more. They cannot be heard amidst the clamours of  
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the turbulent, the merciless, and the inflexible. The genius of the Gospel is evaporated in the wild claims of the Greek church, and the furious bigotry of Rome. Men no more waved the banners of Jesus as invitations to unity and love, but as the signal to battle and persecutions. The reciprocal fury of Christians, in the fourth century, is said by a cotemporary writer to exceed that of the brute creation.

To augment these calamities, a fatal event unhappily contributed. As the light of the Gospel gradually faded, a gloom succeeded, which was rendered still more lamentable by the setting of that lesser light, which fell together with its primary. Literature and Christianity are the two great instruments of moral information, and they sunk together. A dimness, imperceptibly increasing, overspread the earth from century to century, till the period of the Reformation. The whole moral and intellectual world lay in total darkness. The traces of Christianity were scarcely visible through the thick obscurity. During these wretched ages, priests and people were equally degenerated through ignorance and vice. The one would not lead, the other knew not where, nor how, to find the track. It is in the highest degree mortifying



mortifying to human pride to read the history of those illiterate ages, and to trace the progress of this increasing darkness, when crimes, generated by barbarity, were nourished by superstition, and produced all the baneful fruits of blind enthusiasm.

At length, however, by the revival of letters, sacred peace was restored, and men again felt the genial heat, and were directed by the infallible light of divine knowledge. This, however, was not effected but by repeated struggles.

From hence, the following consequences may be remarked—

First, That wherever men considered opinion as the great essential in religion, and codes of faith as the great characteristic of the true Christian, they lost sight of the precepts which that religion inculcated; and that whilst they were anxious to establish speculative systems, they forgot practice; that while they were disputing about creeds, they lost Christian charity; and thus, in search of the letter, the spirit of the Gospel was evaporated.

We may next remark, that learning and religion, as they mutually cherished each other, fell and revived together. When the light of learning set, that of religion could no more be distinguished.

guished. As the one was restored, the other was also renewed. If Christianity, however, is indebted to literature, learning will be found indebted to religion infinitely more beyond comparison.

True Christianity, again, it will appear, seems to have flourished, with the greatest vigour, during the Apostolic ages. From these happy seasons we follow it in a gradual decay; and nominal Christianity only characterises succeeding centuries till the Reformation. A new dawn then succeeds; and this we may flatter ourselves continues to be still advancing to an higher state of brightness. Reason, true philosophy, and increasing knowledge, the second means of Providence, will strip adulterated truth of adventitious ornaments, and preserve the Gospel in its native simplicity.

Should it be inquired from what causes the Almighty thought proper to withhold the light of the Gospel from so many ages of the world; should the sceptic arraign the divine wisdom, and assert the necessity of an earlier dispensation, it were perhaps difficult to find a satisfactory answer; humility must therefore acquiesce in a confidence on the goodness of God. St. Paul, discoursing on the different states of the Jews,  
and



and those who had not been favoured with revealed religion, offers one observation, which, if not a solution of the difficulty, is an answer to the question. *When the Gentiles, says he, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, then having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the works of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing, one another\**. They therefore had the law of reason, and, to correct the imperfections of that, the Christian dispensation was published. One remark, however, may be offered. It appears to have been a part of the grand scheme of Providence, to prepare the minds of men for the reception of the Gospel, by civilization and literature. For this purpose we observe a regular interference of the Deity in the history of mankind. The Christian doctrines cannot be comprehended by minds unprepared by previous habits of culture, and therefore cannot surely be practised. The word of God may be sown, but it will not take root in an unpropitious soil. Of barbarians can only be made nominal Christians. The wild natives

\* Rom. ii. 14, 15.

of Africa, or the savage tribes of America, must for instance be softened by moral discipline into milder habits, or the doctrines of Jesus Christ would be taught them in vain. The Gospel, it is true, would produce every desirable effect; but its influence would be obstructed and retarded, under unfavourable circumstances.

By some it is objected, that the light of revelation has discovered nothing new, of which the world was not previously informed. Revelation is the confirmation of natural religion. The wisdom and goodness of God would not suffer the world to remain in utter darkness. Natural religion, therefore, is a dawn of doubtful light. Revelation is a meridian splendour. By the suggestions of reason men may hope in God; but revelation only can give them real confidence. Is there no novelty then in the certainty of those promises, of which we could only hope by nature? To an unprejudiced mind, however, it is easy to prove, that the Gospel has been the instrument of considerable moral information.

So far from reality is the assertion, that the Christian religion discovers nothing new, that an argument directly contrary to this may be supported. Without a divine revelation, we can  
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be assured of the truth of no religious doctrine. We may raise our hopes, but what ground shall we find to sustain them? If truth is not in Christianity, what religion is true? And if that is not so, all the expectations of virtue and wisdom must be without foundation. If, therefore, the certainty of what we could only hope, if a reconciliation to God, through Jesus Christ, if the resurrection of the dead, and an undoubted immortality of bliss, has nothing new, it is difficult to discover in what system of religion the lovers of novelty may be gratified.

You, I trust, are convinced, that Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, and that no man cometh to the Father but by him. May we then never lose sight of this rational and well-grounded confidence; but whenever we are assailed by the conflicts of doubt, amidst all the delusive arguments of the sceptic; whenever we are tempted to forsake our God for the world, and exchange our best expectations for the momentary pleasures of sin, may we look up with unshaken faith, and with a firm reliance on Him, who has said, and said with a power of conviction the most irresistible, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life* \*.

\* John, xiv. 6.

It is to be observed, that the great advantage to be derived from all revelation, is certainty. While, therefore, we can entertain confident hopes of futurity, we are not anxious about new discoveries. We hope that the Almighty may love us, and that he will provide us an asylum, in a better state, from all the troubles and pains of an unsatisfactory life. We wish to extend our being into that better state; and what can be more grateful? what can be more animating, than to have the promise of Him, in whom there is no *variableness, neither shadow of turning*\*; not only that we shall live, but that we shall *live together with him*†?

The Christian religion is said to have been planted in this kingdom during the first century. Let us then be thankful for this divine message, which reconciles us to God through an immaculate and crucified Mediator; let us rejoice in the hope of immortality, and in the blessings of spiritual freedom.

For such transcendent marks of providential care we are thankful to our Almighty Parent, and to that love which redeemed us. We glory in the privileges of a reformed church; but we boast not with spiritual pride, or narrow bigotry.

\* James, i. 17.

† 1 Thess. v. 10.



We pretend not to infallibility. We consider all human works as imperfect, and all human opinions as liable to error; of which all that the purest society can boast, is to have least mixture. The Jewish church is metaphorically represented in the Scriptures by a flourishing vine, which spreads its luxurious branches; but may not that abundant foliage, which affords the coolness of shade, or the shelter from storms, occasionally intercept the light of the day? and accordingly some ages previous to the Reformation were gloomy and obscure.

The Christian dispensation, in its pure and regenerated state, is at once a scheme of awful sublimity, and of engaging softness. It represents us as the children of a universal, affectionate Parent, whom nothing but sin can offend. To him we are reconciled by a merciful Mediator. We become *the sons of God*\*, and the *joint heirs of Christ*†. The eyes of faith behold an offended Parent; but in the same moment he smiles with inviting condescension. We are taught to shed the tears of repentance; and we see our offences blotted out for ever. We are led in the way to present peace, and to eternal bliss. We are instructed how to live in the

\* Rom. viii. 16.

† Rom. viii. 17.

busy world without anxiety, cheered by the joys, but not depressed by the evils, of life. The pollutions of sin are exchanged for the purity of heaven, and the miseries of the present, for the raptures of immortality. The world recedes, and shrinks from our view; but a glorious scene succeeds; too splendid for human eyes to behold with distinct vision; but which all the warmth of human imagination cannot reach.

The wishes of piety will now be gratified; and we may hope that the flame of devotion will burn with a rational and happy fervour. May we here meet often and long in the enjoyment of mutual good-will, in the spirit of true charity, and with that undescribable peace, which a life of piety and virtue will assuredly secure; a peace *which the wicked cannot know*, a peace *which the world cannot give*.

The pleasures we may expect to derive from assembling in this place of devotion, will be of the most exalted nature. For these let us be thankful to the Almighty, by whose grace we have been enabled to prepare him a decent habitation. Whenever we assemble here, may we experience the sentiments of grateful piety, and the raptures of heavenly love! These are feelings of no transient, or unprofitable nature; these



these will produce fruits as permanent as they are blessed; consolation on the bed of sickness, and in the hour of death; grateful during the vicissitudes of life, and rapturous in the awful day of judgment.

Let us then join in the petitions offered by Solomon, at the dedication of his temple: *Will God, said he, in very deed, dwell with men on the earth\*? Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee, how much less this house, which we have built. Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servants, O Lord, that thy ears may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldst put thy name. Hearken therefore to the supplications of thy people, which they shall make towards this place; hear thou from thy dwelling-place, even from heaven, and when thou hearest, forgive. Render unto every man according to all his ways, whose heart thou knowest (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men). If thy people sin against thee (for there is no man that sinneth not), and if they return to thee with all their heart, and all their soul, and say, We have sinned, we have done amiss, then hear thou from the heavens, thy*

\* 1 Kings, viii. 27, &c.

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*dwelling-place, their prayers and their supplications, which they offer in this place, and forgive thy people, which have sinned against thee.—Now to God, only wise, be glory, through Jesus Christ, for ever\*.*

\* Rom. xvi. 17.



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S E R M O N    X I I I .

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*ON NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.*

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S E R M O N XIII

ON NATHAN THE STRANGER



## SERMON XIII.

*ON NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.*

2 KINGS, v. 12.

Are not Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?

**T**HE Scriptures abound in historical relations, which admit of very improving and practical remarks. To comment on these is one of the most useful modes of popular instruction; for as the circumstances of an event may be easily retained in the mind, the observations which naturally arise, will make a stronger impression. Thus memory may assist practice; and when we fall into an intricate situation, we shall not be in want of examples or precepts to direct our steps. As the occurrences of human life are frequently similar, we shall be enabled, from facts, to foresee, and consequently to prevent, the bad effects of any particular error. When we learn from conviction the evils inseparable

parable from any act of indiscretion, or the dangers which attend on any improper pursuit, we may certainly avoid them, if we suffer reason to direct our choice, and summon resolution sufficient to withstand the allurements, and to dispel the false representations, of passion.

With a design of this nature I shall proceed to enlarge on the history, of which the text is a part.

We are told in this chapter that Naaman was a captain, or chief commander, in the army of Benhadad, king of Syria; that he was high in reputation and in preferment; that he was carried by his master. Having performed some acts of valour, and exhibited great skill in military affairs (*for by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria* \*), he became the object of royal favour, and was dignified by every mark of public approbation. Thus blest with affluence with power, and pre-eminence, there were, no doubt, many who envied the fortunate Naaman. But as no human enjoyments are perfect, and as no human happiness is without alloy; as the same Providence which, through his infinite goodness, in order to lessen our afflictions balances every evil with some good, and to check our pride

2 Kings, v. 1.

mixes



mixes every good with some pain, we find this favourite of a court labouring under one misfortune, which was in itself sufficient to poison all his satisfaction, and to render every pleasure in life insipid and oppressive—for *he was a leper* \*. One of the first blessings, and on which all others must depend, is health; without this, the soul sits confined in the body as in a prison. We see gay, enchanting objects around us; we observe others elated with successive delights; but we dare not enter into the splendid scene; we dare not join the sprightly dance. All that is pleasurable passes by us, without communicating the sensations which others feel. No sun cheers us; no breeze conveys freshness. The hours creep slowly on, and charm the fancy with no future prospects. Our highest wish amounts only to freedom from pain; to ease, not to rapture; and disappointed of that, we still languish. All the day long we sigh for night, and *when we lie down we say, When shall we arise, and the night be gone* †? We are in vain courted by the blandishments of luxury; and we feel no relish from all the cost of splendour: Whereas health and easy spirits cast a perpetual sunshine over the breast, enliven it with successive and unin-

\* 2 Kings, v. 1.

† Job, vii. 4.

interrupted delights, and chase away the clouds of care or disquietude. During disease nothing can charm; and with health little else is required for content. Let none then, who enjoy this best gift of bounteous heaven, repine, however low their condition may be, but look up to the Author of all good with a lively sense of religious gratitude; and let them beware, lest, by intemperance or rash folly, they lose that blessing, without which *nothing is perfect, nothing is pure.*

From the situation of Naaman we may further learn a melancholy truth, of which the experience of every day will furnish us proofs; that the possession of wealth, or the honours of pre-eminence, are in themselves very insufficient for happiness. We should therefore never envy those who are placed in a more exalted station; knowing that the practice of piety, and virtuous pursuits, can alone confer unadulterated satisfaction, and that, independently of these, the world can afford no peace. For how often do we observe the sons of fortune, like Naaman, sighing amidst a profusion of enjoyments; either stung by the remorse of a guilty mind, or depressed by mortification; lamenting imaginary evils, or mourning from real causes of affliction: Yet  
still



still they are high in the opinion of the discontented, and admired by the weak. But let us follow into retirement those who are surrounded by temporal splendour, or who affect the smiles of luxurious gaiety ; we shall no longer aim at that greatness which cannot yield content, nor pine for the pleasures which are so dearly purchased. We shall find, that, however we may estimate men by their external circumstances, or by the variety of their sources of comfort, God has so distributed happiness and misery, that poverty will often look cheerful in the cottage, whilst the great are sighing *beneath roofs painted with vermilion, and languishing on beds of ivory* \*. We shall find that, either from the numerous and inevitable misfortunes of life, from our own passions, or from the vices and follies of those with whom we are unavoidably connected, almost every human being whom fortune has favoured, or honour dignified, has still, like Naaman, some secret affliction to blast his enjoyments ; that either the tortures of disease, or the seeds of dissatisfaction, are concealed in the flowing cup of prosperity. Even fantastic wants create a vacuum in the mind, which no present attainment can fill. If you express to

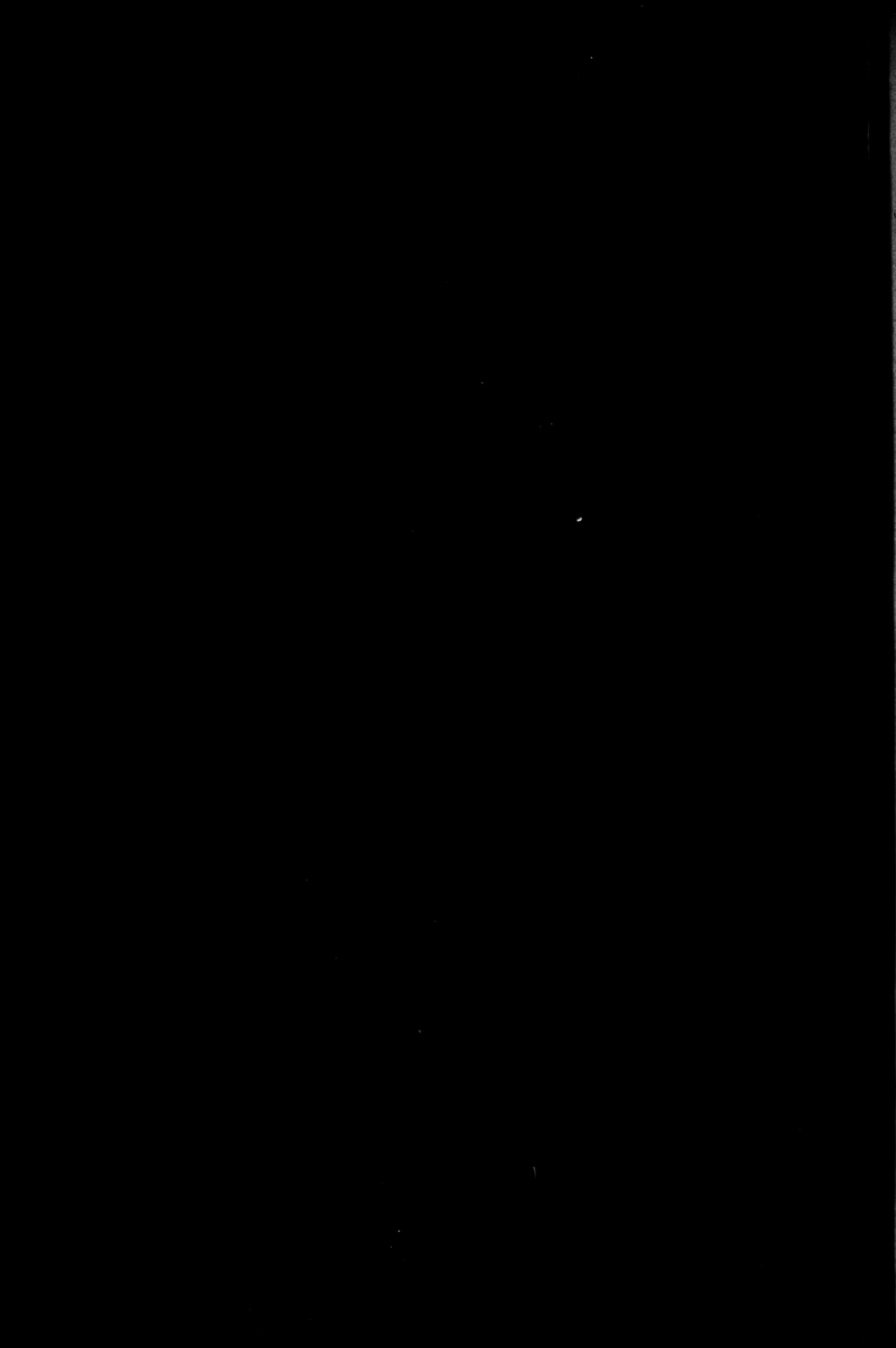
\* Jeremiah, xxii. 14.

the man, on whom riches are profusely poured, your congratulation on his success, he will tell you some melancholy tale of disappointed hope, or of ungrateful returns of friendship; of tedious delay, or of those apprehensive fears, which corrode and harass his mind with the dread of losing his acquisitions, or of being separated from what he loves. Even the possession of our wishes proves the source of discontent; and when we have reached the summit of our desires, we shall find that we have not left care behind, but that, as it happened in the instance before us, all our honours or pleasures are soured by some secret evil.

But is there not often a concurrence of trivial events, which contribute to form the sum of our happiness? Is there not a superintending Providence, which directs even the minute circumstances of our lives, and produces the most fortunate revolutions by accidents, which are apparently natural? The pious mind will indulge and cherish this idea with a fixed and perpetual confidence in the love of God, whatever sceptics may object. In the circumstances which follow, something of this kind occurs: *For the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive, out of the land of Israel, a little maid;*









*and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, Would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy* \*. Those who would attribute such incidents entirely to chance, and ungratefully exclude a Providence from his share in the formation of the prosperity or comfort of men, will be ready to consider all such events as merely of a casual nature. Nothing was certainly more natural than for the damsel to celebrate the virtues of the Prophet, who had performed miraculous acts in her own country, and the places adjacent; but it is equally certain, that without the captivity of the damsel the leprosy of Naaman might never have been cured. And however in this, or any single instance, we cannot discern the immediate operation of God, yet in similar transactions in our own lives, we must be lost to sensibility, and to every affection that is amiable, if we deny a superior agency; if we receive good, and disown the Giver. Revolve in your minds whatever has occurred in your own lives. Do you not recollect many events which have appeared to have arisen from accident, and which have yet been highly instrumental to your welfare? Have you not fre-

\* 2 Kings, v. 2.

quently experienced very material alterations in your condition, from the coincidence of unimportant changes? And to what shall you refer such a favourable tendency of things, but to the care of an Almighty Parent, who, in the figurative language of sacred poetry, *feeds his flock like a shepherd, and leads them through pleasant pastures, and to streams of living water*\*; attends them with such unwearied and effectual watchfulness, that he *preserveth all them that love him*? And while this active vigilance is employed in forming the general welfare of mankind, it is most wonderfully exerted in gratifying the necessities, in increasing the happiness, and preventing the misery of each individual; and whilst it disposes and predetermines the fate of an empire, sees not a sparrow fall without a providential knowledge. On reflection, we shall discover that both our own, and the prosperity of those who are comprehended within the circle of our observation, have been effected by a concurrence of minute, of unforeseen, and unexpected circumstances; and if such have been sometimes productive of evil, let us not murmur against the divine agency, but rather confess the true cause of our failure in the indulgence of

\* Isaiah, xl. 11.



those irregular passions, in those perverse and obstinate attachments, in those ill-directed and dishonest pursuits, which have drawn down ruin on our heads.

Induced by the artless representation of the damsel, and by those sanguine hopes which are natural to the afflicted, Naaman resolved to apply to the man of God: He therefore went to Ben-hadad, and requested his permission to visit the Prophet. To this the king consented, and wrote a letter to Jehoram, the king of Israel, to this effect: *When you shall have received this letter, you will know my desire is, you should cure Naaman of his leprosy* \*. When the king of Israel had received this letter, from misapprehension, or from that natural irritability of temper which produces misapprehension, and much consequent disquietude amongst men in their general transactions, he grew exceedingly wroth, and expressed his resentment with the utmost extravagance. *And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill or make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore see how he seeketh a quarrel against me* †. As soon as this came to the

\* 2 Kings, v. 6.

† Ver. 7.

knowledge of Elisha, *he sent to the king, and said, Let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a Prophet in Israel* \*.

In compliance with this request Naaman came *with his horses and his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha* †. As it is probable that the visit of the Syrian was attended with no small pomp, Elisha, perhaps to check his arrogance, and to convince him that he preferred worth to titles ; that he possessed sufficient natural dignity to resent the insolence of a proud superior ; not from an affected indifference, but from a real simplicity and integrity of mind, contented himself with sending a verbal message to Naaman, directing him to wash himself seven times in the river Jordan, and that he should then be clean. By the conduct of Elisha Naaman might be taught, that, in the eyes of the good, desert only is true honour ; and that no human dignity will compensate for the want of it. A proper application of such suggestions might have produced a cure more valuable than that which Naaman sought, in the rectification of his mind, together with the restoration of his health.

\* 2 Kings, v. 8.

† Ver. 9.



Naaman, however, from the disgust attendant on mortified vanity, from having expected greater ceremonies, and from estimating the advantage of things, more from the concomitant circumstances than from their intrinsic value, was highly incensed at this message. He began to retire ; and as the part which most offended took the fullest possession of his mind, it was first expressed. *I thought*, said he, *that he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper* \*; as if the manner of applying the remedy would have produced any difference in its efficacy. But Naaman had diseases of the mind as well as those of the body. Whilst he wished to be relieved from pain, he neglected the cure of greater evils ; he wished at once to enjoy health and adulation. *I thought*, said he, *that he would have come out to me ;* and then added, in the words of the text, *Are not Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel ? May I not wash in them, and be clean* † ?

But the servants of Naaman seem to have had more reflection than their master. As they were neither influenced by passion, nor stung by

\* 2 Kings, v. 11.

† Ver. 12.

mortification, they saw clearly ; and, as he was turning away in great wrath (for the resentment of a man whose pride is humbled is commonly extravagant), began to reason with him, very justly, in the following manner : *My father, had the Prophet bid you do some great thing, would you not have done it ? How much rather then, when he enjoins so simple an experiment, when he only says to thee, Wash and be clean \* ?* By this judicious remonstrance, when his impetuosity had subsided, Naaman was convinced, and accordingly complied with the injunction of the Prophet. He went down to the river, and, in conformance to the Levitical ceremonies, washed himself seven times (seven being esteemed by the Jews a propitious number), and his flesh was restored to him (says the context) *as the flesh of a little child †*. Naaman, after his cure, returned to the Prophet, and was admitted to a conversation ; in which we find him breaking forth into acknowledgments of his faith in the true God : *Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel ‡*. And for the blessing he had received, he offers a reward to the Prophet. But Elisha, whose retired and studious life, whose unaffected indifference to riches,

\* 2 Kings, v. 13.

† Ver. 14.

‡ Ver. 15.

and



and to all secular concerns, removed from him all luxurious wishes, and secured him from that temptation which proves a source of misery to nations and individuals, was not to be prevailed on to accept of any retribution. He considered the gifts of Heaven as too sacred to be bartered for gold, and that it was his duty freely to dispense what he bountifully received. He was satisfied with the luxury of doing good on pure and disinterested motives, and of being the humble instrument of the glory of God. He would receive no poison which might corrupt his integrity, and introduce anxiety into the tranquil scenes of a sacred retreat, whence the world and all its cares were banished; where by meditation he was abstracted from sense, and wholly employed in preparing himself for the active duties of life, and in the pursuit of divine knowledge.

But though the Prophet would accept of no reward, he complied with the request of Naaman, of some of the earth of Judæa for an altar to the Lord; this being more holy in the common estimation.

Naaman concludes with requesting to be pardoned for accompanying his master in future,

and bowing to the idol in the temple of Rimmon; or, as some think, by turning the future into the past tense, for his previous transgression in idolatrous worship. After this he departs, with the blessing of the Prophet, *Go in peace.*

I shall conclude with a few observations.

From the misconduct of Naaman, we should learn to submit to all the dispensations of Providence, and consider his law as the best guide to happiness. We should remember that it is impossible for us to judge for ourselves; because we cannot foresee events, nor discriminate, with any degree of accuracy, those which are present. Blinded by passion, by prejudice, and partiality, how shall we determine the nature of those circumstances, or chuse that path which is most likely to produce us felicity? But on the supposition that we could distinguish the means, how shall we set them in a train to operate for us, when we have no power of averting evil, or of anticipating good? If we trust in Omnipotence, we shall be resigned to all events; because we rely on unchangeable affection, and rest on the assurances of infallible truth. By complaint at our condition, we either doubt his fidelity, or deny his love; and if we believe not that there  
is



is a superintending Being which rules over us, *we are of all men the most miserable* \* : We shall then have no consolation in adversity, and the lightest evils will be magnified into the most formidable terrors.

From the conduct of Elisha we may learn to moderate our expectations ; so shall we find content in every situation, and prevent a thousand causes of uneasiness. The reward which Naaman offered he refused, because he knew it to be dangerous to the soul : He feared that, instead of administering to the comfort or convenience of life, it might sow the seed of discontent and unhappiness ; for gold too often begets care and misery, and creates more wants than it relieves. It gives us more pain in the possession, than we have felt in the desire of it ; for that which teaches unknown enjoyments, dissipates our thoughts, distracts our minds, and leads only to disappointment and despair.

Let us then endeavour to confine our wishes within that circle which Providence has circumscribed. Be assured that content is always positive tranquillity ; and that is more permanent than rapturous enjoyment. Under the influence of this passive virtue we shall never distrust

\* 1 Cor. xv. 19.

the Power that guards us, and shall never be forsaken by him. Satisfied with his dispensations, we shall not say with Naaman, Is there not some other way? *May we not wash in other waters, and be clean?* We shall rise with cheerfulness to our daily employments, and after the hours of virtuous labour retire to uninterrupted rest. We shall pass through life with internal composure, and with external peace; and when it shall please God to call us to a better world, we shall experience that happy change which resignation, and the exercise of good affections, will have enabled us to participate, and taught us to enjoy.

To this happy state may God, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, call us, when to his wisdom it shall seem best.



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SERMON XIV.

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*ON THE FALSEHOOD OF GEHAZI.*

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SERMON XIV

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ON THE FRIENDSHIP OF GENRES

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## S E R M O N XIV.

ON THE FALSEHOOD OF GEHAZI.

2 KINGS, v. 26.

Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, or men servants, or maid servants?

**I**N a former sermon I related to you the transaction between Naaman the Syrian, and Elisha the Prophet. It is now my intention to enlarge on the misconduct of Gehazi, the servant of the latter.

It is said, in the preceding part of the chapter, that Naaman had pressed Elisha to accept a recompence for the cure he had performed. This, from motives of the purest nature, the Prophet refused, and expressed, no doubt, his refusal in such modest terms, as at once convinced and satisfied the Syrian.

But

But Gehazi, the confidential disciple of Elifha, who is always represented to have followed him previous to this event, was not of so disinterested a disposition as his master. He was not capable of conceiving that indifference to riches, which the example and the precepts of the latter ought to have taught him. He was unwilling to lose so favourable an opportunity of enriching himself; and had not sufficient delicacy to be anxious about the manner of doing it. He was not nicely scrupulous, and thought, as too many are apt to think, that the acquisition of money would repay all the dangers and difficulties of obtaining it. He therefore resolved to risque the displeasure of Elifha, if his avarice should be detected, and in order to conceal it, to practise art and dissimulation. And what will not this fatal passion, the love of money, do? What corruption does it not introduce, and what crimes will it not tempt us to commit? If we review the scenes which are recorded in history, or are now transacting in the world, we shall find the most atrocious evils to have sprung from this insatiable passion. For this, the sword has thinned the generations of men. Through this, peace and tranquillity have ever given place to



to rapine, extortion, and to the perpetration of every enormity which disgraces the human nature, or disturbs the happiness of mankind. The desire of possessing wealth steels the heart against the feelings of nature ; it is a gratification of self-love, and can only be pursued to the exclusion of others. Through this, friendship is subject to distrust, deception, and treachery ; through this, even in connexions of the most tender nature, we experience falsehood, disgust, mutual art, and mutual disquietude. Through the influence of this vile and sordid temper, parents have been robbed of the duty and affection of their children ; nay, we have even examples not only of children unmercifully forsaken and cruelly neglected, but even pursued with hatred and malice by their obdurate and avaricious parents. In a word, there is no crime which the love of money does not occasion ; and therefore it is with singular propriety that the Apostle calls it *the root of all evil* \*.

*As soon therefore as Naaman was gone a little way, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman, this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought ; but as the Lord liveth, I will*

\* 1 Tim. vi. 10.

*run after him, and take somewhat of him*\*. No sooner was this resolution formed, than he resolved to put it into execution. So Gehazi followed after Naaman; and when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from his chariot to meet him, and said, *Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men, of the sons of the Prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.* And Naaman said, *Be content, take two talents.* And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed, that is, concealed them, in the house; and he let the men go, and they departed†.

By the sons of the Prophets, we are to understand the disciples of the Prophets. Gehazi, therefore, under a charitable and false pretence, extorts this sum from the rich Syrian. It may be urged, that there was no great offence in accepting what the other had offered, and that, independently of the falsehood, the act was in itself

\* 2 Kings, v. 20.

† Ver. 21—24.



Not very heinous. The object too was inviting; for if we are to understand in this place Hebrew talents of silver only, the amount was very considerable. But it is to be observed, that Gehazi was peculiarly situated: He was engaged in the service of one whose whole life was devoted to the pious duties of prayer and meditation, and the no less indispensable acts of beneficence. Dedicated to God, and favoured with his holy gifts in an eminent degree, the Prophet embraced a voluntary abstinence from the enjoyments of the world, nor designed to accept those riches which might alienate his heart from religious considerations, and which could not be possessed consistently with the more noble and liberal occupations of his life. Gehazi too we are to consider not as one merely employed in menial services, but in the same pursuits as his master, though in a subordinate degree. Superfluous wealth was not only useless, but inconvenient, in a life that was often itinerant, and which was miraculously supplied; and even when more stationary, spent in retirement. The Prophet too had refused any recompence; and of the reasons of that refusal it is to be supposed Gehazi could not be ignorant. There are few persons to be found so disinterested,

interested, as to be wholly sentimental in their benevolence, and to object to a recompence when fairly offered; especially when the motives for a denial are of a nature rather delicate than criminal: And they who are engaged in traffic know how difficult it is to withstand the temptation to profit, when there is a possibility of covering a fraud. The generosity of Naaman exceeded the request, though perhaps not the expectation, of Gehazi. We read that he begged one talent, but the Syrian constrained him to accept of two; that is, contended with the false modesty of Gehazi, who appeared to gratify his avarice with reluctance, the better to conceal his avaricious design.

But so intricate is all error, that, to apologise for one crime, we are commonly under the necessity of committing another. No vice is single; for no vice can be practised without some dissimulation; and wherever there is art, there must be error. Dissimulation too begets absolute falsehood; and falsehood ever propagates evil in its own support; for it must be sustained by repetitions of the same fault. From hence arises an habit of depravity; and with that habit we lose the sense and the shame of guilt: And when we are blind to the deformity of sin, we are totally



tally lost. Let us beware, then, how we indulge in trivial offences: Few are at once abandoned; but the steps of vice are easy, and its progress imperceptible. If we venture into its paths, we shall find them perplexing and treacherous. Whereas virtue has no need of art: It supports itself on the solid basis of truth, and leads to no intricacy or cares. Sin is accompanied by constant fear, by painful solicitude, and restless anxiety. Virtue has no torment: It is ever cheerful; it is crowned with serenity of mind, and with exquisite enjoyment. Guilt only is the parent of misery and despair.

Thus Gehazi, having framed one falsehood for the attainment of his wishes, was under the necessity of aiding that by a series of inexcusable fictions. And where now was the satisfaction he had promised himself in expectation? All enjoyment was destroyed, by the anxiety of preserving that which he had obtained, and of the consequences of the error he had committed. He had exchanged virtue for care; and with the loss of his innocence he had forfeited his peace of mind. And such wretched bargains do we usually make, when we part with our integrity for the pleasures of sin; when, to purchase a small portion of the world, we injure the more

important interests of the soul, and resign the hopes of eternity for the joys of a moment.

The first consequence which results from the attainment of the object of our desires is, the knowledge of its disproportion to our wishes. For the delight we have conceived in imagination is commonly less exquisite in experience; and possession will generally prove it to have been by no means worth the labour of acquisition, or the diligence of pursuit. With every sinful pleasure the observation is indisputable. But what language can describe, or who that is innocent can imagine, the misery which proceeds from the resignation of that peace of mind which innocence affords? Painful indeed is the change from a state of inoffensive tranquillity, to a state of guilt, of torment, and unavailing remorse.

*But Gehazi went in, and stood before his master; and Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither \*.* But how must the conscious soul of Gehazi have been struck with terror and shame, when he was thus addressed by the Prophet: *Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is this a time*

\* 2 Kings, v. 25.



*to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, or men servants, or maid servants \*? Is this a time to think of the world, when we have the work of God to do?—But the anxiety of the wicked Gehazi was short, for soon was the awful sentence pronounced: The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow †.*

We have remarkable instances in the Scriptures of the severe penalty which has attended dishonesty, when accompanied by falseness. To this immediately before us, we may add the fate of Ananias and Sapphira. But as these vices are very common in the world; as there are no acts of dishonesty which are not contrived and perpetrated by dissimulation, concealed by art, and defended by prevarication, it is necessary to remind you of the extreme danger of such positive guilt; guilt which is so clearly displayed to us in the immediate and temporal punishment of those who have dared to incur it.

From the example of Gehazi we may learn to beware of the effects of one of the most fatal passions which governs the human mind. The

\* 2 Kings, v. 26.

† Ver. 27.

approaches of avarice are insensible, and its progress is fallacious. Reason here will assist us in the establishment of the habit; since there are no instances of a covetous act, for which some specious excuse may not be framed. We may shut up the avenues of compassion, either by constantly dwelling on the possibility of our own wants, or by impatience for the gratification of our own desires. We may deny to poverty or friendship the participation of what we possess, and withhold what we ourselves can never need, from imagining our own security from distress to depend on the quantity we accumulate. Having thus busily and anxiously collected, we may live amply provided, but never communicating; like the bee in winter in a torpid state of abundance. We behold our own wants magnified in the perspective of imagination, and look at those of other men with an inverted glass. By such an habitual mode of thinking, we shall both learn to refuse mankind the comfort of our charity, and deprive ourselves of the enjoyment of our property.

But the next advancement of covetousness is from the desire of acquisition to the desire of stripping others of the advantages which they possess, or which we may insatiably wish to centre

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tre in ourselves. The gradation from avarice to dishonesty, as it is very natural, is also very imperceptible; since he has little to do who is eager to obtain the goods of others. Give him but the opportunity, and his honour will soon yield to his wishes; he therefore is more than half undone, who in imagination anticipates the attainment of the wealth of his neighbour.

When we seriously reflect on the shortness of life, and the great chance there is against the duration of the existence of any individual, it appears really astonishing that any person should be tempted to an act of dishonesty. For when we consider that no advantage can long profit us, and that for every transgression we must incur the anger of the Almighty, what is there in the object adequate to the risque? Yet thousands ever have been, and it is to be feared ever will be, misled by the strong temptation of momentary fruition, to forfeit the pleasures of a good conscience, and to dare the vengeance of Omnipotence.

The man who is induced to dishonesty, with a view to enlarge circumstances not embarrassed, or he who desires to extricate himself from difficulties, or who pleads, as a private excuse, the necessities of his children, or the distress of his

situation, are all culpable ; for the Gospel will here condemn them, together with the voice of reason. They recommend industry and care in every instance ; and religion bids us rely on Him, whose providential wisdom is ever employed in promoting the good of his creatures. Such, then, seek what the will of that Providence has not bestowed, and consequently what they can have no right to expect ; and therefore no pretence, however ostensible, should induce us to break through the indispensable laws of morality. Violence and oppression are constantly denounced in the Scriptures as meriting the anger and the punishment of the God of righteousness.

But though extreme poverty has something more to allege, yet this will appear altogether without just foundation, when weighed in the balance of reason, or examined by the principles of the Gospel ; for if you are poor, you are as the Almighty, in the course of his parental arrangements of the world, designed you to be. If you attempt to improve your situation by the transgression of his laws, you attempt to wrest his blessings from him by force ; and his vengeance will pursue such a flagitious conduct. The way which leads to the possession of those  
treasures,



treasures, *which neither moth nor rust can corrupt* \*, is shown by a divine Instructor; and whenever you forsake the paths of religion, you must expect to be forsaken by Him, who loveth those only who keep his commandments.

But further: A single act of dishonesty, in general, serves only to relieve a present want, or to gratify a temporal indulgence; the advantage is therefore merely momentary: But even where it is more durable, it has no security. The fear of justice will ever pursue the sinner, and deprive him of all peace of mind; and if he is safe from justice in this world, yet is there not an awful tribunal hereafter, where every act shall be displayed in its true colours, and where every unfair and unlawful deed shall condemn the guilty to those sufferings, which He only can soften, who may, but who alone knows how far he will forgive? Thus will all our illicit desires prove the source of misery in the present world, and rob us of all our peace; and on the approach of death we shall look with a sense of horror which the good cannot conceive, and which the wicked shall most assuredly experience.

\* Matt. vi. 19.

May God Almighty preserve us from the fatal effects of avarice ; enable us by his gracious assistance to withstand the temptation of this powerful passion ; guard our virtue where it is most weak ; and after a life of honest and useful industry reward our pious labours with eternal rest in his presence, through the intercession of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, &c.



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SERMON XV.

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*ON EARLY PIETY.*

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SERMON XV.

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ON EARLY DEATH

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## S E R M O N    X V.

ON EARLY PIETY.

PART I.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

**T**HE text recommends an early remembrance of the Creator to youth, because that season is best adapted to the great duties of religion, and because it will conduce to render their subsequent passage through this transitory state more exhilarating; not only afford them the best of future expectations, but be more productive of every temporal blessing.

To remember our Creator is, in the language of Scripture, to worship and to serve him; as to neglect what we owe to him, is to forget him. The propriety of the phrase is obvious. He surely forgets God, who is insensible to all that the great Being enjoins, and to all that he  
constantly

constantly does for his creatures. The sun cannot shine, the rain cannot water the earth, the air cannot breathe fragrance, without reminding us of God. We hear him in the wind; we fear him in the shades of night. The starry firmament showeth his work; and the moon in her majestic and solemn pace, with her soft and soothing light, at once proclaims his greatness, and pictures to us the tranquillity that is to be found in his presence. Is there a leaf that vegetates; is there a flower that blooms, which does not exhibit striking marks of his skill? What then should we remember, if not Him, *who is ever mindful of us*\*? What then should we remember but Him, *in whom we breathe, in whom we live, and have our being*†? What should we remember but Him, whose tenderness, whose goodness, are every-where conspicuous; and whose affection is as unlimited as his bounty?

To be lost to a perception of all this, is to be lost to every finer feeling. Youth is the season of ardour, when all the passions and sentiments are warm; when sensibility is exquisite. It is the season when curiosity is alive; when the mind is susceptible of affection, liberal and open, expansive and generous. Can we boast of gra-

\* Ps. cxv.

† Acts, xvii. 28.



itude, and yet deny it to Him who made us, who keeps, who ever guards us? *who daily poureth out all his benefits* \*, and spreads a scene around to gratify every sense, to fill every wish, every capacity of the soul? Can we possess tender affections, and yet not centre them in Him, who *is love*? the fountain of all that is benevolent, of all that is great and good?

Where, O youth, shall you bestow those your kind affections, where turn your open and liberal minds, where give your expanding gratitude, where offer up the first-fruits of your ripening sentiments, but to Him who is *above all, and in all, and through all* †? where direct your eager inquiries after happiness? where ask for enjoyment, but of Him who is consummate wisdom, and all whose works speak perfection; of Him who is a perpetual source of felicity to himself, and is ever communicating happiness to infinite myriads of his creatures; *to Him in whose presence is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore* ‡.

If youth is unmindful of the great Creator, it can possess no true gratitude; if inattentive, it can have no true sensibility. It is a spring nipped by frost; it is verdure clothed in snow;

\* Ps. lxxviii. 19. † Eph. iv. 6. ‡ Ps. xvi. 11.

it is a dawn cloudy and unpromising. Who shall hope that his affection will ever be regular or sincere, who is inattentive where nature, where reason, where the highest obligations lay the earliest claims? Who can hope that benevolence shall ever become wide, active, or universal; who can hope that tenderness can ever be sincere in human transactions, when it cannot be awakened by the first and best object? Who can ever expect him to be warm, either in friendship or in love, on earth, whose affection cannot reach to heaven?

Let us then first consider the motives which induce young persons to remember their Creator; and next, the advantages which will result to themselves.

The most natural pursuit of a rational being must be happiness; for every nature must search after that end which is most congenial to itself, and require enjoyments most adapted to its capacities. Creatures whose powers are solely confined to sensual objects, can only derive satisfaction from them, devoid of all reflection from the past, or hope in the future; but a being which derives its enjoyments from reflection as well as sensation, can alone find true happiness in those pursuits which will present it with the prospect  
of



of some powers beyond the present, which will continue to gratify as long as it is capable of receiving gratification. Here then is the distinction between present enjoyment considered as an evil or a good. If it can afford delight only from itself, independently of hereafter, it must be contrary to, and unfitted for, the purposes of a rational soul; for reason immediately tells us that we are capable of eternal enjoyment; whereas the objects of sense are transient and momentary, on which account the pleasures of reason and sense are diametrically opposite to each other, and the latter is unsuited to the purposes which a rational nature requires; but if present enjoyment tends to promote eternal pleasure, then it is as essential to the rational soul.

It is a question commonly agitated, and of considerable importance, how far happiness may be found in our present state. All men complain of their want of success: They, however, would seldom fail, if they would form a fair estimate of the nature of temporal things, and proportion their desires to that just conception. Uninterrupted enjoyment cannot certainly be expected, where every thing is confessedly imperfect. The man of pleasure, who is eager for

a succession of raptures, and would live in a whirl of delight, must be disappointed in a state where transport is from nature momentary, and where transport must naturally beget weariness. Those tempers which can bear no control, which grasp at every thing, and are not satisfied with fulness, must ever feel the tortures of vexation. But a disposition directed by wisdom, and regulated by religion, like oil, which is said to have the power of calming water when agitated by a tempest, will be able to extract consolation from every circumstance, to preserve the composure of the soul.

Calamity must befall us, because calamity is the portion allotted to us by Providence, as the trial for the improvement of human virtues; but it must be observed, that none of the evils incidental to our present state, and which arise from the laws imposed by the Almighty on temporal things, contain half the bitterness which we experience from the irregularities and excesses of our own passions.

The error of mankind does not so much lie in the object, as in the means, of happiness; for if we direct to a wrong point of view, it cannot be possible for us to satisfy our wishes. If we make the pursuit of present pleasure our only object,  
then



then we shall most certainly be disappointed ; but if, on the other hand, we make it the instrument of our future welfare, or use it only as it was designed, for the solace of our passage through life, then we shall perceive that innocent enjoyment is not detrimental to our present welfare, and we may therefore conclude, to our future. That life cannot afford uninterrupted felicity, is most certain ; and therefore no one endued with any share of reason, would entirely rely on it. But it would be absurd to affirm that it cannot at all exist in this world ; for such an idea is contrary to the experience of wise men, and of equable tempers. It is an insult to the attributes of a merciful Being to suppose the contrary, who, perfectly happy in himself, cannot but will the happiness of his creatures. A philosopher of the Gentile world has affirmed, that happiness is the action of the soul, according to the perfect principles of virtue ; and this definition is consonant to the dictates of natural reason, and to the experience of mankind ; For as virtue, from its very nature, is capable of affording constant serenity, reason must suggest to us its innate excellence, and persuade us to pursue a good, so well calculated to gratify the utmost extent of our wishes ; and there must

exist a natural affinity between them. That this definition is agreeable to the experience of mankind, may be proved from the consent of the wisest, before the Christian dispensation; many of whom have acknowledged the vast consolation and pleasure they have derived from virtue; such as to sooth the pains and anxieties of age, and the miseries attendant on adversity. If, then, moral virtue is the introduction to intellectual happiness, it must follow that religion, between which and virtue there is a perfect analogy, will be our best guide to it; and that, above all, the Christian religion is calculated to promote the end of this great, this universal desire: For as no system of ethics has ever been invented by the art of man, so perfect and clear in every respect as that which the Christian scheme composes, it must therefore be best suited to the nature of a rational being.

Having, by the former arguments, endeavoured to evince this grand truth, that all happiness must be derived from religion, it will next be our business to show why it cannot be found in any other pursuit. From which we may draw a natural inference, that early and habitual piety is the only road to true enjoyment, either in this world or the world to come.



1st. All happiness must be derived from religion; nor can it be found in any other pursuit.

The first argument on this head may be drawn from the nature of temporal things, which, even for this short space of human life, cannot satisfy us. Pleasure is transient; is interrupted by so many evils, and liable to such various accidents, that, generally speaking, we derive more happiness from the prospect, than from the enjoyment, of our wishes. Even the hopes that we draw from society, the most desirable are commonly disappointed. In youth we set forth, elevated by the warmth of imagination, flattering ourselves with a thousand ideas of joy. We are captivated by the charms of gaiety, and conceive enthusiastic notions of friendship; we suppose mankind to be as honest and unsuspicious as ourselves. But a short time undeceives us: Pain, sickness, or misfortunes, cut off our hopes of pleasure, and when we fly to friendship for the solace of our woes, we may chance to find those the most faithless, in whom we have placed the greatest confidence. Every day convinces us of the vanity of life, and the folly and deceit of mankind. We discover that we have been intoxicated with dreams of joy, and captivated with phantoms of our own creating, which

prove to be merely shadows; and when we awake we see nothing around us but a barren waste, dreary and comfortless, without a guide to direct, or a friend to console us.

But those worldly pleasures, which are the offspring of vice, so far from affording us perpetual delight whilst we remain here, will absolutely destroy the capacities of the soul. Religion persuades us to obey its precepts, because they tend to happiness in every respect. It exhorts us, for instance, to temperance and sobriety; they beget health; health is the parent of vivacity. Charming beyond expression is the season of early and virtuous youth; a season which those who have past ever look back to with regret for its short duration, mixed with enchanting recollection; a season when every mind must be delighted; when no days are shadowed with gloom; when the world is beheld with happy ignorance, and all the future points to scenes of perpetual and unfading bliss. Then cheerfulness of mind begets lively spirits. We look on all around and before us with hope, complacence, and content. Without content every attainment would be vain; and poverty, through this, may be equal to affluence. Blessed with this virtue (to speak in the language of the Apostle),  
though



though *having nothing*, we are *possessed of all things*\*. But vice first interrupts this charming state, and leads us to immediate misery. Intemperance produces pains of body, and anguish of mind. Let us, for example, but look around, and view the many miserable beings who are cut off by an untimely death, and sent to the grave in the bloom of youth, or forced by indiscretion and sin to drag on a tedious existence; stung with the remorse of a distracted mind, and the anguish of a painful body; languishing under the tortures of chronic diseases, and for ever rendered useless to themselves and to society.

Amidst the riot of excess, or the mad tumult of debauchery, the pleasures of vice will reflect a transient beam of joy, but will leave no tranquil consolation on the mind in the hour of reflection, or day of adversity; will leave no comfort to compose the anxiety of age, but will embitter the evening of life with sorrow and disease.

It were needless to relate the various pursuits by which men endeavour to gain happiness. The same arguments will hold good with all of them, since they all depend on the same accidents, and are all involved in one common fate.

\* 2 Cor. vi. 10.

For if we affirm that this world, from its instability, can present us with no certain prospects of happiness, neither can any thing here answer our expectations independent of hereafter.

But in the worship of the Supreme Being, we shall find that peace which the world cannot give; because, both from his nature, and from the nature of happiness itself, we have every reason to expect all the enjoyment which a rational soul can possibly require. And therefore the sacred writings describe the pleasures that are to be found in his worship and in his presence, by the metaphors of streams of living water, and unfading crowns of glory: Because God is capable of dispensing to his creatures more than the most ambitious or the most insatiable desires can conceive; and he who places an entire confidence on the Almighty, will have a friend to console him both in prosperity and adversity.

It is on the principle of right reason, therefore, that the wise man recommends to us, in every state and condition of life, to be mindful of our Creator; that is, to remember the duty we owe him as creatures, and to repose our utmost confidence on him, whose friendship is not of this world, and whose affections are neither governed by partiality or caprice.

But



But further. As the happiness of a reasonable being consists in reflection as well as sensation, the practice of virtue must have a natural tendency to promote it. The pleasures of sin, we know, may indeed leave an impression on the mind, but it will be such as can give birth to no agreeable reflections. The remembrance of sensual enjoyments can give no rational satisfaction, but will rather create anguish and pain; for it cannot afford the least delight to think of past pleasures, which are at an end, when we at the same time perceive ourselves capable of receiving new satisfaction from every moment. And though our capacity of enjoying worldly pleasure grows daily less and less, yet we still find reason, nay nature itself intimates to us that we are capable of enjoying pleasures of a different kind, and that though we have lost all relish for the objects of sense, we are notwithstanding capable of superior enjoyments; for the hope of future existence is inseparable from our nature. Corporeal dissolution only is such a shock to humanity, that though we receive daily proofs of it, yet till sickness, or some such calamity approaches, we can scarce suppose it near at hand. That this weak, though wonderful substance, the body, will

will perish, is indeed too evident ; but that this excellent mind should annihilate, is a thing beyond the possibility of belief. That these wonderful faculties, by which we conceive, reason, and conclude, shall cease to exist, is an idea of which we can form no conception ; and if the soul is thus formed for eternal existence, there must be some pleasures, some happiness, suitable to it, of an eternal duration, agreeable to its own nature, to succeed the momentary pleasures of sense. That here they do not exist, reason, experience, precept, tell us ; but that they may be found in God, the same reason loudly declares, and even the objects of sense clearly demonstrate. They evidently prove that there must be a Being of infinite perfection, who has created them ; and if perfect, then good ; for it is impossible for that which is not good to be perfect ; and if he is thus good, he must be likewise happy, and capable of communicating happiness to his creatures : And thus, from the nature of the divine attributes, we conclude that he is able to give us above all that we ask or desire. And reason clearly pointing out that the great Author of our being is thus perfectly wise, good, and consistent in himself, it is but reasonable to suppose, that his benevolence will induce him to dispense a  
propor-



proportionate share of happiness to those beings, whom he has evidently formed with capacities for receiving and enjoying it.

The fear of God, then, or, what is the same, the remembrance of our Creator, is justly and properly styled the beginning of wisdom. For the first and best use of the reason implanted in us, must be to direct our thoughts, and lead our wishes, to those pursuits which can best answer the purposes of our existence. And on what better foundation can we build our hopes, than on that Being, who is known to be omniscient as well as omnipotent, and, withal, perfectly beneficent? his power enabling him to perform what his wisdom dictates to be right, and his benevolence prompting him to obey the suggestions of that wisdom, and to exert that power. Let us then be mindful of our Creator in the day of prosperity, that in the hour of adversity, whenever we need him, he may remember us. Let us cast away all concern for the things of this world, which are so faithless and unsatisfactory, and place our confidence in Him, who *is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever* \*.

*The Lord is our shepherd (says the Psalmist), therefore shall we lack nothing; he shall feed us*

\* Hebrews, xiii. 8.

*in a green pasture, and lead us forth beside the water of comfort; yea though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet can we fear no evil, for his rod and staff shall comfort us \*.*

*And again: The angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste, and see how gracious the Lord is: Blessed is the man that trusteth in him †.*

\* Ps. xxiii. 1, 2, 4.

† Ps. xxxiv. 7, 8.



## S E R M O N XV.

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ON EARLY PIETY.

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## PART II.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

**W**E have already seen that the fear of God is the best foundation for human happiness. We next proceed to observe, that therefore early piety will most certainly lead us to temporal, as well as eternal, felicity.

By a religious education, the mind is habitually formed to a virtuous practice before sin can possibly influence the inclinations; for if sufficient care is employed in preventing evil, all the first impressions must be good, and we shall be fortified against improper solicitations. There is a considerable force in habit. The early affections are generally strongly rooted. If the disposition is engaged on the side of virtue, there will

will be a great power of resistance against the passions, which are not only violent, but also subtle and encroaching enemies. If we are led early to the knowledge of vice, what hope is there of preservation? But in the course of years virtuous principles will predominate, and keep the soul in a state of security. We shall not be easily enticed. Conscience will not readily be reconciled to guilt. The mind will not assimilate to bad practices. We shall not be able to float down the stream of pleasure, however inviting seduction may be, without some reflection on the dangers that may ensue, or the rocks which lie concealed. On the other hand, bad habits are too easily acquired. The imperfection of our nature exposes us to error; and from the prevailing corruption of the world, we can scarcely pass through life without partaking, in too great measure, of its follies, if not of its vices.

Few set forth in the paths of wickedness boldly; unless, through the criminal negligence of parents or guardians, the precepts of virtue have not been properly imprinted on the mind. The misconduct of men generally proceeds from ignorance; but total depravity is hardly ever incident to those who have been well instructed.

The



The progress of sin is gradual: One fault leads to a second; and the first commission of error is therefore extremely dangerous; for by that the purity of the soul is sullied—the best protector against the open and direct solicitations of the wicked. The young sinner has many formidable difficulties to encounter; many weighty and laudable scruples to overcome, before he can acquire an impious courage. The natural fear attendant on every transgression, the suggestions of reason, the voice of conscience, inform him that he is acting imprudently or heinously. The dread of losing his reputation with the world, the apprehension of incurring the displeasure of the Almighty; all these prove serious and useful preventatives. It is impossible for him to rush forth without hesitation; he must often tremble at his progress; and it is not till sin becomes habitual, that he can obey it without reluctance. He requires some time to reason himself out of his good principles; and that he cannot do till conscience is entirely subdued. Can he ever conceive that there is not a God, or a future state? that there is no punishment for the wicked? Can he believe that mankind have been all deceived, and that the wisest amongst them have been all deluded with an idle dream of wild enthu-

enthusiasm? Can he believe all the harmony, the order, the beauty of the creation to be the effect of chance? Must he not therefore conclude that there is a superior Being, who expects order and improvement from man? And how therefore can he pursue the pleasures of sin, without frequent anxiety and remorse?

The enormities of the vicious arise from a negligent forgetfulness of duty, or a determined opposition to truth. The last is a most deplorable state. But against the former, a depraved and shameful course of inattention, and against every evil, will a reverence of the Deity preserve us. When we are accustomed to think of God, to endeavour to please him, to conform our conduct to his will, we shall always have a motive to oppose to temptation. The grateful will do much to oblige an earthly benefactor; and what ought we not to do for Him, to whom we owe every thing? When youth is assailed by solicitations of a captivating nature, what shall they oppose to present pleasure, if they are governed by no fixed principles? Can the tree that has no root withstand the storm? Youth, in such a state, is a plant growing by a stream. It flourishes to the eye in the most luxuriant verdure; but the tide is daily and insensibly sapping its found-



foundation: The very means that supply gaiety, destroy its vital principle.

It is from the want of fixed and confirmed notions that we are all overcome; but in early life this defect is too fatal. When passion violently assails, or flatteringly and softly seduces, the voice of reason is unheard, or her powers are charmed into inaction. A rapid tide hurries us away. The bed of roses lulls us to sleep. Could we divest ourselves of the infatuation which passion creates, we should perceive that perfect happiness, and true goodness, are virtually the same; and that all error, as it is a deviation both from religion and from reason, must unavoidably terminate in misery. Without fixed principles, how can the young be preserved? Experimental knowledge they cannot possess. When persons of riper years offer their counsel, they are too apt to reject it from a mistaken idea, that the old, being past the capacity of pleasure, are from malice and chagrin disposed to rob them of their share. Age is too often morose and ungenerous in its censures; and how shall the season of presumption and of vanity listen to harsh admonitions, which it has so apparent a reason for rejecting?

To point out to youth distant inconveniences, to show them remote rewards, to endeavour to transport the delighted eye from the flowery foreground to the obscure horizon, will have little effect. The language of that age is, *Come, let us enjoy the good things that are present; let us fill ourselves with costly wine and with ointments: Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness: Let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place; for this is our portion* \*.

We must therefore endeavour to convince them that sin contracts their present pleasures; that religion does not aim at depriving them of enjoyment, but, by increasing their capacities, teaches them the proper use of it; that their years may not be few and full of evil †; but that they may live long, and see good days ‡.

Do you then, who offer precepts, have recourse to facts; and you who are young, view the miserable consequences of impiety in the fate of those who fall within the circle of your observation.

How many are there, who set forth into life with a thousand ideas of joy, ever floating in a warm imagination; flattering themselves that there are no obstacles to perfect rapture, deter-

\* Wisdom, vi. 7—9.

† Genesis, xlvii. 9.

‡ Psalms.

mined



mined to deny themselves no pleasure which lies within their reach. But how few are there who propose to themselves any solid, any rational scheme of happiness ! How few are there who perceive this truth, that all sublunary enjoyment consists in that serenity of mind, which we call content ; and in those hopes of hereafter, which are founded on the tranquil pleasures that result from the duties of religion and the practice of virtue ! How many are there, who, through indulgence of passion, and through the example of bad companions, rush into perpetual scenes of debauchery ! And what is the happiness that vice affords them ? The transports of a few short years only : And when they awake from the giddy dream, they find themselves robbed of health, of reputation, of friends, of the support of heaven ; condemned to pass the rest of their days in misery and anguish. But many do not so escape—cut off amidst the pursuits of sin, they hasten to the grave in the bloom of their days ; without preparation for death, and ripe in guilt. Others fall a sacrifice to public justice, and pay the tribute due to mankind for the injuries they have committed. Others, again, after having curtailed the lives of tender and affectionate parents, through their immorality and ingratitude, live

only to the contempt, the pity, and the hatred of mankind; the anguish of a disturbed conscience, and the acute disorders of an afflicted body; all the sad effects of their folly and intemperance.

It is too often the case that youth is apt to suppose it will be time enough to serve God when they cannot serve sin; that is, not to think of a better world, till they have sufficiently enjoyed the present. To this common error we must oppose a common and obvious argument. Were the space of our lives known to us, there might be some shadow of reason in this supposition. But should we be cut off in the midst of sin, where will there be room for repentance? Besides, the habitual pursuit of vice will render the practice of religion more difficult and more laborious; and it will be too late to serve God when we can no longer serve sin; when the constitution is destroyed, and the faculties are impaired. Nor is there any reason to hope, that, after having for a time indulged ourselves in licentiousness, it will ever be in our power to govern appetites so long depraved, or to assume a new mode of life; for the man who endeavours to disengage himself from vicious habits, undertakes to fight against himself, to war with secret enemies,



mies, which, under the character of friends, have long enslaved his affections. He must therefore not only quit his former engagements, but undergo a total change of his disposition, of his will, and his affections; and so painful is this duty thought to be in the holy Scriptures, that Jeremiah exclaims, *Can the Ethiopian change his skin; or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil\**. And in the Gospel, the man who undertakes to subdue and mortify his old affections, is said to pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right hand—so dear, so engaging are habitual sins.

On the other hand, the early practice of piety leads us towards perfection by easy and almost imperceptible degrees. It is in a great measure the same with bad and with good habits. The affections, whether depraved or virtuous, acquire strength by time; and there is a strong presumption, that he who has pursued a continued course of goodness, will persevere in it to the end of his days; though instances are sometimes found to the contrary, where an unfortunate perversion of mind may take place. But how shall a man forget propensities, and forsake practices, which are become customary; and therefore dearer to

\* Jeremiah, xiii. 23.

him, perhaps, than existence itself? And what consolations will there not result from the reflection of a well-spent life, in the evening of our days, when few other pleasures retain any charms for us; and the remembrance of all past delights, unless such as are rational, will torment and depress, instead of amusing the mind? In a word, piety will prove the best resource for us under those unavoidable calamities which are incident to our nature as men; will secure us amidst all the trials and difficulties of our passage through the world, and will finally conduct us to the mansions of peace, where no sorrow shall reach us, no temptation assail us, no affliction shall disturb us.

Amidst the number of snares, the variety of allurements to which we are subject; amidst the many dangers that threaten, the many temptations that surround us, where such powerful passions distract, it cannot be possible for young persons to *keep themselves unspotted from the world*\*, unless by the assistance of Heaven. Remember then thy Creator in the days of youth, while yet you have strength and power to serve him; *before the evil days draw nigh*†, when the punishments of vice shall overtake

\* James, i. 27.

† Eccles. xii. 1.



you; the years of remorse and of too late repentance; when ye shall undoubtedly say, *We have no pleasure in them* \*. In the mean time, it may be useful to offer a few cautions for the preservation of inexperience.

The first is, for young persons to avoid all bad companions, who by ill example, or pernicious advice, may lead them to ruin. It is the general fault of youth to be too easily drawn aside by that false shame, which the world calls good-nature, but which rather deserves the name of cowardice or folly. They have not resolution to withstand the mockery of riotous and dissolute companions; and would rather lose the esteem of good and wise men, than bear the jests of the profane and ignorant. They forget that even bad men revere virtue, and that when they find it impossible to laugh others out of their good resolutions, they will reverence the magnanimity which has dared to withstand them; for courage and consistence are qualities which ever secure respect. Ridicule may obtain a temporary triumph, but must at length yield to virtue; that and wisdom being not only synonymous terms, but in reality the same. There can be no practical wisdom without vir-

\* Eccles. xii. 1.

tue, and with practical virtue there must ever be wisdom. And let me ask you, if you cannot support the scoff of a few abandoned wretches, how shall you bear this repulse from the Judge of the world, in the sight of men and angels, *Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels* \*? For he has declared in his gospel, *Whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels* †.

The next caution necessary for youth is against idleness, which may be justly considered as the nurse of all evil. The want of employment gives a freedom to the imagination, and imagination gives a spring to action. The indulgence of bad thoughts is too often a step to the commission of evil; and the soul is never in greater danger, than when it dwells on the objects of pleasure. When the mind is busied in any innocent or laudable manner, it has no leisure to attend to impure inclination; and the recreation from useful labour, or serious study, is generally attended with such a serenity as will not permit the mind to wander from that which is praiseworthy; whereas idleness exposes us to the

\* Matth. xxv. 41.

† Mark, viii. 38.



most dangerous species of temptation—flow and deliberate solicitation. A vacant mind is the *house which the evil spirit findeth empty, swept, and garnished*, and where having found others worse than himself, they enter and dwell\*. In this perilous state every bad thought is treasured up in the mind; is cultivated from the moment of its birth, till, like a noxious weed, it soon corrupts the whole soil. There is nothing more useful for preserving youth in a course of virtue, than employment, and the study of good books. They will excite to the love of religion, and fortify the mind against the attacks of temptation. Indolence first destroys the energy of the soul, and then corrupts it. This first induces young persons to forget their Creator. Thousands begin with the neglect of the public worship of the church, and of private devotion; and proceed to extremities, by single steps, till they are totally lost in a labyrinth of infatuation, of shame, and of ruin.

The young should be fixed and constant in their resolutions. A wavering and doubtful mind, bespeaks a weak head; and inconstancy in virtue is the greatest of all inconsistencies. To be *carried about by every wind of doctrine*†, and

\* Mark, xii. 44, 45.

† Eph. iv. 14.

by every passion, is a proof that we have no fixed opinion; for to be in love with virtue to-day, and vice to-morrow, is such a contradiction in itself, that there is little hope of his preservation who can act so variously. At the same time let youth be very careful how they listen to evil communication, or receive any false principles. They will find many who, by specious arguments, will endeavour to reason them out of their good resolutions; and sophistry is frequently a delusive path to the inexperienced: But however plausible the arguments of such men may be, a little time will undeceive us. We may perhaps subdue conscience for a short space; for a few years at most: But when adversity draws nigh, and the punishments of an offended God, which by unalterable laws he has rendered inseparable from sin, overtake us, we shall perceive the deceit of all such vain, such empty subterfuges; then we shall learn, by a painful conviction, that no conclusions are true, which are not built on the solid basis of religion and virtue.

Again, let it be the particular care of youth never to repose too great a confidence on themselves, or to imagine that they possess sufficient strength to resist temptation. It is absurd and  
enthu-



enthusiastic to search for opportunities of trial. Reason should induce us rather to shun, than to rush into danger ; to avoid, rather than to seek the combat. By evading the trial of our strength, we are sure at least that we cannot be overcome ; but if we rashly encounter peril, there is too great probability that, from our weakness, where pleasure is the object, aided by passion, we must fall a prey to such powerful enemies. To fly into the face of battle, where courage cannot avail, and force is unequal, is intemperate heroism, and deserves rather the name of madness, than of magnanimity. Humility is the offspring of wisdom, and self-opinion of folly ; for the same may be said of our virtue as of our knowledge, that the more we possess of either, the less we shall esteem ourselves ; and the greater our experience, the more we shall be convinced of our weakness in both respects. Humility keeps us on our guard ; but self-confidence exposes us to every danger ; and without vigilance and caution the enemy may surprise us. The sacred writings in this, as well as every other respect, will be our best guide. They teach us, that, without the assistance of God, we can do nothing ; and that he despises a proud and a lofty spirit.

Preci-

Precipitance is a general error of youth, and subjects them not only to many immediate inconveniences, but entails a variety of pain on all of subsequent life. In haste to possess whatever the passing moment supplies, they imagine that an opportunity can never be regained ; that an offer may never be renewed. This is a strong stimulus to desire, and counteracts the efforts of prudence. Eager to embrace the present, the future is forgot. Almost every man may remember when he thought that life could never present a satisfaction equal to that immediately before him ; when he thought no object could be loved like that which engrossed his first affections ; and when he lamented a disappointment as the annihilation of all future expectation. Though the young are commonly full of hope, it is seldom or never applied to the resistance of temptation, or the denial of their desires. Hence by impatience they hastily indulge every capricious choice ; and when they awake from the dream of fancy, have to lament their vehemence and want of discretion in perpetual repentance and incurable despair.

If then we resolve to walk in the fear of God, let us remember to rectify our minds while we are yet capable of receiving good impressions ;



and let us not suppose mere negative morality to be sufficient to form the character of the good man. He is still imperfect, who cannot boast of more than to have avoided general vice; and there is no great hope of him who acts from no principle; who does not rest the performance of his duty on the clear and evident deductions of his reason; for there is but little room to suppose that he will not be led away by the allurements of pleasure, who has no other motives to restrain him, than the custom of the world. We ought not only to abstain from evil, but to be practically useful.

Remember then thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the years of adversity draw nigh, or the evil days of age overtake you; when repentance and remorse for the reflection of an ill-spent life shall add to the calamities of the world, and embitter the prospect of another state. You will sink to the grave without consolation, the miserable prey of sin and affliction. Rather now, while you have health and vigour, learn the first and the best wisdom, *to fear God, and keep his commandments* \*.

To conclude—The pleasures that arise from an innocent and religious life have been plainly set

\* Deut. xiii. 4.

forth, as well as the miseries attendant on evil practices. Remember then to preserve the former, and to avoid the latter. As yet, perhaps, your minds are spotless and uncorrupted—O continue in this unsullied state. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin; avoid the first step to error; for it is dangerous, and imperceptibly leads to destruction. When the tender mind of youth is guarded by purity and by rational piety, it enjoys undisturbed serenity; but if it once permits the least approach of sin, it nourishes the seeds of misery and discontent, and will soon become a prey to the worm that never dies\*—a guilty conscience. On the other hand, innocence is the best and most substantial comfort you can feel. It will be your support in adversity, your consolation in affliction. It will sweeten the bitterness of life, and guide you through its snares in peace; and when the hour of death approaches, it will give you courage to smile at its terrors, and to hope for future bliss: And above all, through the tender love of Christ, it will at last conduct you with confidence to the face of God, to everlasting peace and joy above measure.

\* Isaiah, lxvi. 24.

Remember



Remember then thy Creator, and he will be  
 your shepherd to guide you through the dan-  
 gerous paths of life ; and when all the glories of  
 this world shall fade, and the world itself shall  
 pass away, then shall your righteousness shine  
 forth, *bright as the stars of heaven, clear as the  
 noon day.*

THE END.

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